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THE

CAUSES

OF THE

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THE

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OF THE

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by Russell, John Russell, 1st earl.

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THE CAUSES

OF

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

CHAPTER I.

THE COURT.

THE word "Revolution," which was associated, in the days of our ancestors, with events so fortunate, and has inspired so much terror in our own, is applied to changes totally dissimilar in character. When Brutus expelled the Tarquins from Rome, a family was banished, and the office of king was abolished; but the senate retained its authority, and the breach in the constitution was filled by the election of two consuls, who held, for a year, the greater part of the authority which had before been exercised for life by a royal head. In modern times, when the Dutch rose against their Spanish masters, kingly supremacy was done away; but the chief persons of the country were

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called, without confusion, to the government of the state. So, when the English revolted in 1688, and the Americans nearly a century afterwards, the powers which had been abused were taken away from one person, but were transferred, with new engagements and restrictions, to others, who naturally and easily succeeded to the confidence their predecessors had forfeited. But the French Revolution is a revolution of another kind. It led rapidly to that which we often speak of, but scarcely ever see, namely, anarchy. All that had previously formed a title to respect, became an object of proscription; neither wealth, nor station, nor character, nor law, nor even the revolutionary governments themselves, had any permanent influence with the people. The state was left to the guidance of men, who would for ever have remained obscure, had they not become eminent in crime. The ruling assembly was converted into an arena, where each gladiator trod in the blood of his comrades; and when his turn came, his fall was applauded with as much savage delight as that of his antagonist had been but a few moments before.

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It is our purpose, however, not to describe the French Revolution, but to enquire into its causes. The singular spectacle of deeds so cruel, in the midst of a nation so polished, must excite the mind to observe and reflect. The duty of the historian requires more than a lamentation over the horrors of this terrible period; nor will it be enough to show that reforms, quietly accomplished, would have been better than a violent convulsion. If it be true, as Mr. Burke once said, that rebellions always are provoked, the most eloquent of his invectives ought not to prevent us from enquiring what there was in the conduct of the royal family of France, or in the privileges of the nobility, which tended to excite a deep spirit of revenge against them; or where was the peculiarity in the condition of the remaining classes, which made them each in their turn unable to retain the power they had acquired.

In making these enquiries, it is no part of our business to justify those who overthrew the monarchy. No one accustomed to calm reasoning can allow that the popular voice is an infallible rule for the guidance of measures of state; but although the people are conducted

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by leaders to the choice of wise or pernicious remedies, it is not to be denied that they are seldom mistaken as to the existence of grievances. Let us observe, then, the conduct of the king, the nobility, and clergy; let us enquire in what manner the government acted on the condition of the nation. When we have thus ascertained the nature of the evil, it will be instructive to visit the sources of public opinion; to weigh the merits of the political and moral philosophers, who foretold a change, and who pointed out the road to arrive at it. Never was a nation more prepared for revolution by previous discussion; never did a nation in revolution wander so much without chart or compass through stormy seas, in darkness, and in danger.

Sufficient descriptions have been given of the nature of the French monarchy, as it was established by the relentless vigour of Richelieu, the ablest of politicians, and Lewis XIV., the most skilful of monarchs. The one, by promptitude and terror, had quelled the turbulent passions; the other, by pomp and foreign war, had governed the quick imaginations of his subjects.

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The people, in a state of vassalage, misery, and ignorance, suffered and obeyed. The reign of Lewis XV. somewhat improved their general condition; and government reaped the advantage of what was due to civilisation.

For a long time the situation of France was tranquil: commerce increased; Paris was embellished, and the Boulevards, having been planted during the ministry of Cardinal Fleury, began to display those crowds of gay and idle people, and that prodigious variety of amusements, which are to be seen there at the present day. The manufactures of tapestry, silk, and fine cloth, made great progress towards perfection, and enriched the country. The government assisted in some measure the activity and industry of individuals. In 1754 an edict appeared, permitting the free exportation of corn from one province to another; a particular attention was given to that branch of the government which concerned the roads; an active and enlightened superintendent, of the name of Trudaine, constructed new roads on a magnificent scale. Even the roads, however, bear testimony that they were made rather for the dignity of the

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monarch than for the benefit of his people: they are of excessive width; and while the middle is occupied by a pavement, frequently out of repair, the two sides are always neglected: so that, instead of one good road, you have three bad ones.

A cursory observer, however, might have concluded that France prospered and improved. A longer and deeper examination into the state of the court, the government, and the people, will lead to a far different result.

As every thing in France was subordinate to the monarch; his character, his family, and his court form naturally the first objects of our attention.

It is in the nature of absolute power to produce weariness and disgust. "It is a miserable state of mind," says Lord Bacon, "to have few things to desire, and many things to fear." Some difficulty to resolve, some obstacle to encounter, some balance between hope and fear, form the elements of our happiness, as well as the grounds of our disquietude, and the subject of our complaint. A miser, who should be told that, instead of pain-

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fully hoarding day after day, he should be at once the master of as many millions of pounds as he could wish for, would lose at once his pursuit and his delight. So an ambitious man, who should be made, on a sudden, monarch of the world, would sigh for fresh worlds to conquer, and new opposition to overcome. So likewise a man of pleasure, if all his wishes were at once granted, would find his enjoyments pall, and his temptations cease at the same moment with his anxieties.

These reflections may explain what we are going to relate. Lewis XV. was placed, from his earliest years, in possession of the most brilliant crown of his time; every obstacle to the full enjoyment of his arbitrary will and pleasure had been levelled to the ground by his predecessor; the whole finances of a rich kingdom were at his disposal; palaces, furnished in the most magnificent taste, gave him the choice of a residence, or the variety of a change; at the head of his domestic servants were the most polished nobility of Europe, of whom every man obeyed his orders, and every woman thought herself honoured by being the object of his attachment, or even

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the toy of his caprice. If any one pleased him, the highest honours and the revenue of a kingdom were in his gift; if any one offended, imprisonment or banishment was the effect of a simple letter sanctioned by his signature. The age was one in which every art of gratifying the senses was refined to perfection. Sensuality was never more successfully studied; and even literature, instead of being a dry study for the learned, had become an agreeable relaxation for men of the world. Lewis was blest with unfailing health, a handsome person, a very just penetration, and a judgment naturally sound.

In the possession of all these powers — in the midst of all these enjoyments — the monarch lived in perpetual weariness and disgust. In his childhood, his governor, Marshal Villeroi, had indulged him with obsequious flattery, lest the king should revenge the injuries of the pupil. Fleury had restrained him in a kind of monkish simplicity, which the first yielding to temptation, and the excesses it led to, soon obliterated. The affections of his heart, by nature sluggish, were left uncultivated; and he never learnt to look

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on his fellow-creatures in any other view than as instruments formed for his pleasure, and subject to his absolute dominion. Lewis XIV., who is described to have been equally insensible to the happiness of others, was alive to the love of glory, and affected to tears at the thought of his own greatness. Even this source of sensibility was denied to his successor: he tried war, and was soon disgusted: although the victory of Fontenoy far surpassed any battle at which his grandfather had been present, his mind was too cold to be warmed by the illusions of glory. In the civil government of his empire he was equally indifferent; his only care was to gratify his indolence and timidity, by avoiding a decision; and this temper was so well known, that those about him, on his raising any objection, had merely to say, — "If your majesty orders it otherwise," — "Your majesty's commands have only to be given," — without suggesting an alternative, to make him at once renounce his opinion. Perceiving but too clearly the interested views of his courtiers, and the folly of his ministers, he became the cynical critic of his own govern-

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ment, permitting every ill, but expressing, by caustic sayings, his thorough contempt of the measures he sanctioned and the men he preferred. When he appointed a new person to an office in the ministry, he used to say, — "He has displayed his wares like the rest, and promises every thing in the world, of which nothing will come to pass. He does not know this country: he will see ....." When a plan for restoring the navy was proposed, he said, — "I have heard of this twenty times over: I believe France never will have a navy."

The consequences of this selfish, cold, and timid temper were unhappy to the king, and still more unhappy to the kingdom. The disposition of Lewis was habitually sad; he seldom laughed, and he loved to speak of funerals and tombs, particularly to those who he saw were affected or alarmed by the subject. The amusement of turning, and the patronage of the china manufactory at Sèvres, gave a trifling and temporary diversion to his melancholy thoughts. He was not fond of the chase; and, indeed, looked with indifference on almost all that excites the passions of mankind. In this

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state of languor and weariness, he had recourse to the grossest sensual pleasures, as a relief to the tediousness of life. A few chosen companions who attended his suppers, endeavoured, by the coarse licence of their conversation, and the studied profligacy of their conduct, at once to amuse their sovereign, and to keep him in countenance in the lowest of his tastes. A minister, who served him long, and knew him well, speaking of his timidity, says, — "Not but that the king was very bold in doing wrong; the only courage he possessed was in such a case; the power of ill-doing gave him a feeling of his existence, and a kind of effervescence which almost amounted to anger."*

From the time of Lewis XIV. the place of mistress to the king had become a great office of state. The death of the Duchess of Châteauroux plunged her sovereign into the deepest affliction. She was, as he confessed many years afterwards, the only woman he ever really loved. The courtiers began to fear that his passion for pleasure would be quenched, and his spirits affected, during the

* Mém. de Choiseul, tom. i. p. 184.

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rest of his life. They seem, however, to have taken alarm prematurely; for the Duchess of Châteauroux died in December, 1744, and in January following Lewis had already another mistress. The event happened on the occasion of the magnificent *fêtes* which were given in the course of that winter to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin with an Infanta of Spain. It was hoped that the king, too much accustomed to the beauties of his court, might be struck by charms which were new to his eye; and a masked ball in the city of Paris was particularly looked to as likely to throw in his way some object that might captivate his heart. These expectations were fulfilled: after some false hopes, the person destined to secure the prize fixed the attention of the monarch; she gave herself the air of retiring from his sight, but at the same time let drop her handkerchief. Lewis followed her, and, picking up the handkerchief, threw it after her. A cry of — "The handkerchief is thrown!" was heard in every part of the ball-room; and this important affair was decided by acclamation. The person who thus obtained an empire over the king's inclination, and with it the sovereignty of France, was the

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daughter of a butcher of the name of Poison. Her mother, who was a woman of intrigue, had married her to a sub-farmer of the revenue, of the name of Lenormand d'Etioles, but had all along destined her to royalty; and, with this view, had sent her frequently to join in the hunting parties of Versailles, where she had been noticed by the king, both on account of her beauty and of her address on horseback. Madame Poison was dangerously ill at the period of the masked ball; but when she heard of her daughter's conquest, she exclaimed that her utmost wishes were now accomplished, and she should die happy; so greatly had she set her heart upon the attainment of this splendid dishonour.

For some time the new favourite was kept in an obscurity more suitable to her rank than agreeable to her desires. The king remembered the clamour occasioned by his acknowledged connection with the Duchess of Châteauroux; and when he next set out for the campaign in Flanders, the butcher's daughter accompanied him without any public honours. It was not long, however, before her importunities overcame his reluctance; and under the title of Marchioness of Pompadour, she

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was recognised in the important office of mistress to the king. It is well known that Maria Theresa condescended to write to her; that the ministry of France were dependent on her will; and that the court bowed to her rule. At first, indeed, she seemed ill qualified for this high station; her manners were vulgar, and her mind had a flavour of the soil in which she had been raised. But however difficult it may be for a man to get rid of habits of vulgarity fixed in youth, the nature of woman is more flexible, and those to whom beauty and natural grace are given, find nothing easier to acquire than that mixture of pride and politeness, ease and restraint, which princes and nobles are apt to think peculiar to themselves. Certain it is, that Madame de Pompadour, in a short time, held a language, and maintained a carriage, such as became the chief of a refined society; yet still she felt that, holding a place which exposed her to universal envy, and having no high connections to support her, great address was necessary in order to maintain her influence with the king. To hold him by his affections was manifestly impossible; for his heart was too hard to afford an anchorage. To govern him by his pursuits was difficult;

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for few things could be found to interest him. He did not like business, or delight in pomp, or care for play; and it might be said that his manhood was as little amusable as his grandfather's old age. Nor had the new mistress the convenient tie of devotion, by which Madame de Maintenon could always bring back her sovereign slave. In place of this resource, she contrived a number of galas, balls, and plays directed by herself, and adorned by some compositions from the pen of Voltaire. Having some taste for letters and arts, she became the patron of talent. Men of letters, and artists of all kinds, were called to partake of the liberalities and support the government of the favourite. She herself acted in little comedies, which were produced on the theatre of Versailles; and her brother was made director of the arts, a subject on which he had acquired some knowledge by a journey into Italy.* There was a double barrier, however, against any close union between the king and the chief literary persons of his day. The pupil of Cardinal Fleury could not endure

* He was at first made Marquis de Vandières; but this name being found obnoxious to the pun of Marquis d'Avant-hier, he took the title of Marigny.

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the irreligion of the new school, which he thought it at once wrong in principle and dangerous in policy to encourage. He disliked, and at the same time ridiculed, the patronage afforded by Frederic of Prussia to his distinguished subjects. He often said that he had made Voltaire gentleman of the bedchamber, which was the rank given by Lewis XIV. to Racine; but that Voltaire wanted to dine with him, and that he could not allow. The other obstacle to any connection between the court and the men of letters, was the rising pride and importance of the authors of the age. When Marmontel, who was one of the most supple of his race, was introduced to Madame de Pompadour, she said to him, "Men of letters have in their heads a system of equality, which makes them sometimes wanting in decorum. I hope, Marmontel, you will never fail in respect to my brother."* How superfluous would such a lesson have been from Madame de Montespan to the proudest author of the former age!

If Lewis ever felt any love for Madame de Pompadour, it did not long endure. He

* Mém. de Marmontel, tom. ii. p. 1.

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owned, many years afterwards, that his only reason for not parting with Madame de Pompadour was, that the blow would have killed her.* Even this, however, he could have well borne: the real talisman seems to have been habit; and no doubt Madame de Mirepoix, the most intimate friend of the mistress, spoke the truth, when she said to her, "It is your staircase that the king loves: he is accustomed to go up and down it; and if he was to find another person established in your room, to whom he could talk of his hunting and his affairs, in three days he would not perceive the difference."†

Such was the influence which governed this great kingdom, in its most important as well as in its most trifling actions. In the possession of this great power, Madame de Pompadour was, like her royal lover, melancholy and unhappy. The Duke of Choiseul expressed serious apprehension that she would die of

* He made this avowal to Madame de Seran. This lady was perhaps the only woman that ever was on terms of intimacy with Lewis XV., without being, or wishing to be, his mistress. See the Mémoires de Marmontel.

† Journal of Madame du Hausset.

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chagrin, and her favourite waiting-woman allows the alarm was but too well founded. "I pity you greatly," said Madame du Hausset to her one day, "while all the world envies you."—"Ah!" replied the mistress, "my life is like that of the good Christian, a perpetual combat."*

Such being the state of this most absolute, most expensive, most luxurious, and most unhappy court, the sovereign sought some relief from the tedium of life by indulging in low sensual amours. To this purpose he assigned a small house in a retired part of the park of Versailles, known by the name of the Parc aux Cerfs. Here young girls of the middle and the lower ranks, destined from early youth for prostitution, were placed under the superintendence of the wife of a clerk aided by two assistants, and became inmates of the harem of a Christian king. A major of infantry, it is said, guarded the premises from intrusion. The pupils, as they were called, were taught music, drawing, and history: they were kept separate from each other; and while their destiny was in some measure revealed to

* Journal of Madame du Hausset, in the Mélanges d'Histoire, &c.

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them, the name of their master, we are told, was kept studiously a secret. One thought herself in the house of a German prince, another of an English lord. After a time they received a dower, and were sent away to the provinces: a certain sum of money was set apart for their children. But Lewis never showed any affection for his natural children; he never enquired for them, nor troubled himself with their fate.

Madame de Pompadour was careful not to thwart the inclinations of the king. The better to secure herself from a rival, she ordered an account to be given to herself by the superintendent of the Parc aux Cerfs. It did, indeed, sometimes happen that the king extended his preference beyond the day. A Mademoiselle Roman affected to pay to her offspring the honours of a royal infant. The child was put in the place of honour in her carriage, while she herself sate opposite; and she nursed the infant in the Bois de Boulogne with ostentatious simplicity. But this silly vanity was soon checked by an order for taking the child from her. In all other cases these poor girls seem to have had no influence; and, with one

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or two exceptions, it is doubtful whether they knew the name of their royal lover. Madame de Pompadour, satisfied so long as her place was not invaded, facilitated the arrangements of the licentious king. One instance, among others mentioned by Madame du Hausset, may be given. She informs us that she was one day called into a closet, where she found the king and his mistress alone: Madame de Pompadour told her to go to a house in the Avenue of St. Cloud, where she would find a young person just going to be delivered: that she was to take the direction and preside in the house during the confinement. The king laughed, and said, — "The father is a very good sort of man." Madame de Pompadour added, — "Beloved by the whole world, and adored by all who know him." She then took out of a box an *aigrette* of diamonds, saying, — "I did not choose, and for good reasons, to have it handsomer." "It is too much so already," said the king; and, embracing his mistress, he exclaimed, — "How good you are!" She wept from emotion; and, putting her hand on the king's heart, said, — "There is where I wish to be loved."

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Tears came likewise into the eyes of the king; "and I," says the waiting gentlewoman, — "I also began to weep, without well knowing why."* Had it not been for this express testimony, one would have supposed there never was a scene so little likely to excite tears of sentiment and sympathy. A debauched king providing for the payment of a transient amour, and consulting his legitimate mistress upon the mode of rewarding the object of his double infidelity, affords a picture seemingly as little calculated to excite pathos as esteem or respect; but such was the sentimental part of the character of this monarch.

Lewis saw with indifference the death of Madame de Pompadour: it is even said, that, being in the balcony with some courtiers on the day of her funeral, he took out his watch, and calmly remarked, — "This is the hour of the funeral of the marchioness; she will have fine weather." But he felt her loss in another manner; — he wanted some one to share his intimacy, and lighten the heavy load of unbounded supremacy. It was in vain that the nobles of his court endeavoured, one after the

* Mélanges d'Histoire, &c. p. 324.

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other, to catch him in their nets; some with a wife, others with a sister, others with a blooming daughter. He feared to be involved in a maze of political intrigue and party animosity. It was in vain, likewise, that his panders furnished him with a succession of virgin beauties from the middle and lower ranks of life: their timid respect and cold acquiescence were insipid to the taste of a practised and weary sensualist. Upon a knowledge of this satiety was formed a plan which could in no other case have been attended with success. Count John du Barri, of a noble family at Toulouse, known at Paris as the most desperate gambler and the most passionate swearer of the houses fitted for the reception of gamblers and swearers, had taken for his mistress a Mademoiselle Lange, no less known for the extreme beauty of her person than the unbounded licentiousness of her conduct. After a career of prostitution, she had found it convenient to seek the protection of Du Barri, who, on his side, as a sanction to his house, called her his sister-in-law. Being master of considerable address, and still more impudence, he laid a scheme for transferring his mistress to the sovereign.

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After many attempts, he at length succeeded in attracting the notice of M. Lebel, valet de chambre of the king. M. Lebel was a man whose importance in the French monarchy was not to be estimated by his rank. The king placed an entire confidence in him: hence he was in communication with the ministers, and courted by the most powerful of the great aristocracy. By means of this person, then, Count John du Barri and his pretended sister-in-law were invited to sup with the king. Lewis was enchanted with the exquisite beauty of the lady, and in a few days she was established at Versailles. Lewis could not, of course, be long ignorant of the previous life of his new mistress: he tried, indeed, to shut his eyes, but he found a courtier to open them. Alluding to a financier who had been one of her protectors, he said to the Duke of Ayen, — "I know I am the successor of Saint Farge." "Yes, sire," answered the Duke, "as your majesty is the successor of Pharamond." The Count John, however, no way intimidated by these insults, brought a brother from Toulouse, who was

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married to Mademoiselle Lange in church, and as soon as he had sold his name, instantly went back to the country.

The public establishment of the new mistress at Versailles, however, was the signal of a most furious assault of tongues. The great lords and ladies, who had been unable to procure the office for their own families, spoke of the Countess du Barri in a tone of moral indignation which would better have become a better race. For a time, there was an universal insurrection of the good company of Versailles against the new intruder. Forgetting that Madame du Pompadour had been the daughter of a butcher, they inveighed against the lowness of her origin: overlooking the licentiousness of their own conduct, they protested against the infamy of her character. The Duke of Choiseul joined in the opposition to the sovereign's choice. He never spoke of Madame du Barri but in terms of the most haughty contempt. He was led to join in this opposition by his sister, the Duchess of Grammont, who, it is said, had herself failed in an attempt to secure the envied place of royal

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mistress. On the other hand, all the enemies of the Duke of Choiseul,—all who sought to remove him for their own benefit, all who hoped to make more by the favourite than they could do by the minister, flocked to the worship of the rising Venus. At the head of these were the Duke of Aiguillon, who aspired to the powers of prime minister, and Maupéou, who, having been named chancellor by Choiseul, was the first to plan an intrigue for his destruction. The Duke of Richelieu, discontented with his insignificance as king's friend, assisted the plot, in the hope of faring better with the Duke of Aiguillon, his nephew. Excited by such advisers, Madame du Barri was easily induced to press the king for her public presentation at court. Lewis, who had chosen his mistress away from the noble circle, that she might not be a political instrument, saw this storm arise with uneasiness and apprehension. He endeavoured in vain to fly from his throne to the little apartments, where, with a few chosen friends, and a vulgar mistress, he might amuse himself like a private man. The court was too full of interest, am-

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bition, and vanity, to permit even the modesty of vice; prostitution itself was less shameless than cupidity.

The one party was bent upon expelling the mistress whom the king had chosen; the other upon overthrowing the minister he esteemed. At length, after negotiations, refusals, and concessions more numerous than those which led to the seven years' war, Madame du Barri was presented at court. This day decided the battle: the ladies attached to the king's favour, one by one, paid their visits, and solicited the friendship of the mistress; the clamour of the contrary party served only to irritate the king. It was no longer difficult to see which would prevail. While the Choiseuls confined themselves almost entirely to insults and reproaches against "the creature," the mistress, in the intimacy of the little apartments, was continually sapping their power. Lewis, who had not foreseen this painful alternative, did what he could to prevent the fall of Choiseul, whom he esteemed, and the rise of D'Aiguillon, whom he looked upon with aversion.

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The enemies of the Duke of Choiseul, however, were too much interested in their project to be disheartened. They took advantage of every incident: one of these, trifling in its nature, was exaggerated almost into rebellion. It was the custom in the army, in the absence of a lady of the royal family, to pay the honours of a military salute to the mistress; on one occasion, these honours were to be rendered by Choiseul, at the head of his regiment, to the Dauphine: the Dauphine, finding Madame du Barri was to be present, pretended illness; and Choiseul, finding the Dauphine was not to be present, feigned illness also. Other offences were added to this; the letters of the Duchess of Grammont and her friends were all opened, in order to cull expressions likely to irritate the king; his minister was painted to him as secretly supporting the parliament against the royal authority. Such artful machinations, at length, so effectually disquieted the king, that the disgrace of Choiseul was resolved upon, and he was ordered to retire to his house at Chanteloup. The Duke of La Vrillière, in de-

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livering the *lettre de cachet*, thought it necessary to express his condolence. "A truce to what you don't feel," interrupted Choiseul; "I am persuaded, monsieur le duc, of the pleasure it gives you to bring me this news." So saying, he delivered his portfolio, and turned his back on the courtier.

The disgrace of the Duke of Choiseul, however, produced a novelty, characteristic of the spirit of opposition which was rising even in the court. For two days there was a continual file of the carriages of the most considerable persons in France, on the road to Chanteloup. For many weeks, the courtiers were continually asking the king's permission to pay their respects to his exiled minister.

Let us now turn to the triumphant mistress, and the government of which she was the main support and most beautiful ornament.

The national treasury was filled at the cost of sighs and tears; it was emptied to gain the smiles of the riotous company of the small apartments. Whenever the mistress, or any of her friends, wanted money, an order upon the court banker was given with the profusion

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of a spendthrift. The sums spent by Madame du Barri, and her worthy brother-in-law, were enormous. She alone had, for her allowance, more than 50,000*l.* a year: the presents she received and gave away increased this sum prodigiously.

The Duke of Villequier had a pension of 2500*l.* a year, "on the bond of Madame du Barri;" the Duke of Coigny upwards of 4000*l.* a year, "on the recommendation of Madame du Barri:" the Duke of Coigny had altogether nearly 42,000*l.* a year in pensions and places. The Bishop of Ayen had 1700*l.* a year, "at the recommendation of Madame du Barri."

When in the following reign the "Red Book" was given up to the Assembly, there appeared in it in one sum: — "For services known to His Majesty, 2,441,050*l.*"

We have seen, in the beginning of this work, the manners and morals of the court in the days of Lewis the Fourteenth. In those of his great-grandson the general features remained the same; and yet the difference was in reality considerable. The nobility of the former period were, at least, sincere in their

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conduct; they really believed their monarch to be the greatest in the world; they actually thought it the highest honour to be admitted to his carriage, or to receive his wages, and were firmly convinced that the lowly born were entitled only to blows and ill usage. But in the eighteenth century, while little, if any, progress had been made in the amendment of moral or political conduct, a great change had taken place in opinion. None of the court deemed it any honour to serve the reigning sovereign; none cared, in their hearts, for his opinion; and few believed that their rank was any thing else than an advantage established by custom, by which they had a right to profit. Hence there was no illusion with respect to their own position; they cared less for honours, but more for money: the increasing extravagance of the times, and old debts, made them, likewise, far more needy than their progenitors. But, while they scrambled for public spoil, they were fully aware of their own degradation; they knew that public opinion condemned them, that honour disclaimed them; and they yet continued in their course, contemptible even

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in their own eyes, and therefore one step lower in moral infamy than even the worst of the courtiers of the prior age.

The correspondence of Madame du Barri shows to what a degree the nobility of France crept and crawled for money, to support their infamous lives. The Marchioness of Montmorency offered the illustrious hand of a Duc de Bouleville to the sister of the prostitute. The Prince of Condé, who likewise sought a family alliance with her, addressed her in the following terms: — "I never pretended, Madam, to place any conditions on the marriage of the Viscount du Barri; but I had imagined that, as he is to marry a person with whom I am connected, I might, on this occasion, solicit, through your good offices, favours, which I shall be so much the more pleased at obtaining, as I shall be obliged to you alone. Accept, Madam, my thanks for the two favours already granted me (the purchase of a house, and 60,000*l.* to pay his debts); the third (his admission to the council of state) I hope you will keep in view, and continue your kind offices in this

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matter." * Was ever meanness equal to this?

The nobles of France continued, it is true, the most brilliant society of the age in which they lived. Although extremely superficial, and even for the most part grossly ignorant, there was such a varnish of manners upon them, that they easily passed for men of education. But if we enquire the characteristics of their moral conduct, we shall find that the first and most prominent was licentiousness, the second venality, and the third tyranny. A word or two on each of these heads. In former times, the women of the court had frequently changed their lovers; they were now little better in conduct than the patricians of the Roman empire. As in those days of decline, ladies of the highest rank fell in love with actors or dancers, and did not scruple to make their passion known to the object of it. A sister-in-law of the Duke of Choiseul became so notorious for her passion for Clairval the actor, that she was ordered to be shut up in a convent. The Count de Stainville proposed also to banish the actor. "No, my brother," said the duke, "no

* Montgaillard, Histoire de France, tom. ii. p. 218.

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one cares what becomes of my sister-in-law; but all Paris will cry out if Clairval is taken from them." Generally speaking, however, the court ladies placed their glory in depriving one another of their conquests. "At Paris," says Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, "no one cares to be loved; the only wish is to be preferred."* In such a state of morals, it will readily be supposed that the marriage tie was considered only as a convenient arrangement of fortune, implying no attachment, and imposing no duties. Husband and wife were scarcely ever seen together in public; seldom in the same carriage, or the same house. Nor did the unions which usurped the place of marriage acquire any of its stability: they lasted generally for a few months, often only a few days. A mutual attachment, cemented by affection and habit, was ironically termed respectable, and reckoned nearly as tiresome and ridiculous as marriage itself.† While such

* "Avoir pour les hommes, enlever pour les femmes, étaient les vrais motifs qui faisoient attaquer et se rendre." — *Besenval*, tom. i. p. 205.

† "On qualifioit une telle inclination du titre de respectable, et l'on étoit craint dans la société par la contrainte

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was the society of Versailles, the most splendid establishments at Paris were occupied by the kept mistresses of the opera house, who rioted in the wealth of their noble adorers. One of these was famous for the splendour of her entertainments, and the brilliancy of the theatrical performances in her house, which ladies of the court often attended in boxes hidden from public view.

The venality of the court was no less conspicuous than its licentiousness. It was no wonder, indeed, that men of careless extravagance, and totally ignorant of the value of their estates, should be always deeply in debt: the misfortune of the people was, that Lewis was able to draw from his private fund the means of repairing the fortunes of his nobility. Never were beggars more importunate than this proud race; and what they asked without shame, the king granted without generosity.

While such was the unbounded profligacy among themselves, and mean servility to

et l'ennui que ne pouvaient manquer d'y causer deux personnes qui n'y étoient plus occupées que des sentimens réciproques qu'ils inspiroient."—*Besenval.*

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their superiors, displayed by the courtiers, their conduct to their inferiors was oppressive and tyrannical. If, in the indulgence of his passions, a haughty lord was opposed by a husband or a father, means were found to lay heavy the hand of power upon the unfortunate man, whose wife or daughter had attracted so fatal an admiration. There were various methods of exercising this tyranny; one or two instances of which shall be presently mentioned.

The conduct of many of the prelates who performed their episcopal functions at Versailles and at Paris was not a whit less licentious than that of the king and his courtiers. Never seen in their dioceses, careless of their reputation, they were known to live in the most disreputable company, and to indulge in the most open vice. It may easily be conceived, indeed, that, unless a primitive purity of morals can be maintained, the celibacy of the clergy is sure to be productive of disorder: nor was it likely, or natural, that a man possessed of large revenues, promoted in the giddiness of youth from the bosom of a licentious family, and surrounded by the worst examples,

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should preserve himself free from the general infection. Some of the highest of the clergy gave the worst examples. An opera dancer retired from the stage (Mademoiselle Guimard) disposed of the patronage of the diocese of Orleans, and received the clergy who came to solicit promotion in a superb house in the Chaussée d'Antin, furnished by the bishop, her protector. Dillon, Archbishop of Narbonne, made his abbey of Haute-Fontaine the resort of the most abandoned of women. The Cardinal Montmorency, Great Almoner of France, lived publicly with the abbess of a royal abbey. Breteuil, Bishop of Montauban, made his country-house a seraglio. Champion de Ciré, Archbishop of Bourdeaux, allowed his mistress to do the honours of his table.* Others of the bishops, indeed, lived with decency, and some with the character of extraordinary piety. The country clergy were poor, charitable, and virtuous; but the example of riot set by many of the bishops, and likewise by the rich monks †, roused the indignation of all who wished for

* Montgaillard, tom. ii. p. 245. † Id. tom. ii. p. 246.

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reform, while it encouraged the secret friends of revolution.

It has been often remarked, that the only liberty which the French reserved to themselves was the liberty of laughing at their rulers; and the old French government has been truly called "a monarchy limited by ballads." This kind of freedom, which the most absolute princes have never been able entirely to restrain, obtained full scope in the days of Madame de Pompadour and Voltaire, — of corruption at court and independence of letters.

The Bastile, therefore, was a necessary supplement to the arbitrary government of the kingdom. All do not know the nature of a *lettre de cachet.* The king, by his prerogative, had a right to the services of his subjects: he ordered one of them, by a letter, to perform a certain duty; for instance, to go to a certain place: that place was a fortress; and when once there, no writ of *habeas corpus* existed which would get him out again. The Bastile, a royal fortress, was used for various purposes, — to confine spies, to punish offences the law could not reach, to save a young

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nobleman from ruining himself, to prevent an imprudent marriage, to stifle scandal, to check any turbulent or extravagant fanatic. But it was, besides, the prison of the court, where all who offended the private feelings of the sovereign or his favourites were doomed to expiate their offences. It is said that the famous Duke of La Vrillière signed a hundred and fifty thousand *lettres de cachet* in the course of his ministry: he even sent blank letters to all the inferior governors of the kingdom. At the time of which we now speak, one of the most frequent causes of arrest was libel, or song, or joke, against the sacred authority of the king's mistress. Madame de Pompadour, especially, was remarkably austere against the wits who presumed to make her influence the theme of epigrams or ridicule.

It has been before observed, that nothing can be more arbitrary than the punishments inflicted for this kind of offence. We all know how often public rumour is deceived with respect to the author of any new literary work; and mistakes must have been much more frequent when, as in the case of political songs or pamphlets, the author had the strongest

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possible interest to keep his name concealed. Yet, on no better evidence than public rumour, which usually couples a favourite production with a favourite name, the court of France was accustomed to sentence to imprisonment men of the greatest worth and talents in the nation. The punishments of this sort inflicted by the government of Madame de Pompadour were sometimes, though not generally, very severe. A secretary of the Abbé de Broglie was carried to Mount St. Michael, and confined, as it is said, in an iron cage, where it was impossible either to lie at full length or to stand upright. Others were left in the Bastile, too obscure to be worth the trouble of an enquiry from the favourite whether they were guilty or innocent; or whether, if guilty, justice might not be satisfied by a limited punishment. Dumouriez, who was imprisoned in the Bastile in 1773, witnessed, by accident, the fate of one of these unfortunate persons. Dumouriez had broken the ground of his fireplace in order to procure himself a better apartment, by making pretence that the one he occupied had become uninhabitable. He continues his narrative in

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the following terms: — "The labour did not last more than four hours, but afforded me a frightful sight: this was a man of about fifty years of age, entirely naked, with a very long grey beard, his hair standing on end, who, howling like a madman, threw back through the hole the gravel which I had thrown down. I wished to speak to this unfortunate man: — he was mad. I was afterwards informed that his name was Eustache Farey, a gentleman of Picardy, a captain of the regiment of Piedmont, who had then been confined twenty-two years in the Bastile, for having written or circulated a song against the Pompadour."* But it was not the king, the mistress, or the ministers alone, who punished the crime of offending them by imprisonment in the Bastile: all the great nobility conceived that they also had a right to punish such as displeased them by confinement in the prisons of the state. Marmontel was incautious enough to learn by heart, and repeat to a few of his private friends, a burlesque parody on Cinna, written by a disappointed author to revenge himself on a powerful nobleman, whom he thought to be

* La Vie du Général Dumouriez, book ii. chap. 1.

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hostile to his literary progress. Accused of being the author of the verses he had quoted, Marmontel went to the minister, and fully convinced him the suspicion was unfounded. "It is quite clear," said the Duke of Choiseul, "that you have not written the verses: but you have offended a man of rank, and you must go to the Bastile." The imprisonment of Marmontel was short and light; but in many instances the infliction was really severe. The Duke of Richelieu, — who, under the outside of a dissipated, thoughtless rake, concealed the hard heart of a thorough sensualist, — is believed to have obtained an order to imprison his servant in Fort l'Evêque, because he was an object of affection to a poor girl whom his master had viewed with eyes of desire.

A story of the same nature, but better authenticated, is told of the great Marshal Saxe. He was violently in love with an actress of the name of Mademoiselle Chantilli, whom he kept against her will. She ran away with a pastry-cook of the name of Favart; and it so happened that, on the same night, a storm carried away the bridge of communication between the main body and a corps of the

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French army. An officer of the name of Dumesnil went in the morning to the marshal, to speak on the subject: he found him in an agony of grief. After many vain attempts at consolation, the marshal, at length seeing his meaning, exclaimed, "Who talks of the broken bridge? It is an inconvenience I shall remedy in three hours. But the Chantilli! she is carried off!" The Chantilli immediately married Favart; but the marshal had the baseness to apply to his sovereign for a *lettre de cachet*, to force this unfortunate woman from the arms of her husband: the court granted the order, and Madame Favart was compelled to be his involuntary concubine! *

The arbitrary nature of the imprisonments inflicted in the Bastile is well displayed by an anecdote which Arthur Young professes to have received from an authority to be depended on. "Lord Albemarle, when ambassador in France, about the year 1753, calling one day on the minister for foreign

* Correspondance de Grimm, April, 1772. The Edinburgh Reviewer says, with great truth, in relating the fact, — "In England, we verily believe, there never was a time in which it would not have produced insurrection or assassination."

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affairs, was introduced for a few minutes into his cabinet, while he finished a short conversation in the apartment in which he usually received those who conferred with him. As Lord Albemarle walked backwards and forwards in a very small room, he could not help seeing a paper lying on the table, written in a large, legible hand, and containing a list of the prisoners in the Bastile, in which the first name was Gordon. When the minister entered, Lord Albemarle apologised for his involuntarily remarking the paper: the other replied, that it was not of the least consequence, for they made no secret of the names. Lord A. then said, that he had seen the name of Gordon first in the list; and he begged to know,—as in all probability the person of this name was a British subject,—on what account he had been put into the Bastile. The minister told him that he knew nothing of the matter, but would make the proper enquiries. The next time he saw Lord Albemarle, he informed him that, on enquiring into the case of Gordon, he could find no person who could give him the least information; on which he had ordered an examination of Gordon himself,

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— when he solemnly affirmed, that he had not the smallest knowledge, or even suspicion, of the cause of his imprisonment; but that he had been confined thirty years. 'However,' added the minister, 'I ordered him to be immediately released, and he is now at large.' "*

Such was the justice obtained in the Bastile. The knowledge of these iniquities produced a general feeling in all free countries, both of indignation at the government which sanctioned, and of scorn against the nation which submitted to, such a grievance. Blackstone, in a well known passage, speaks of France and Turkey as countries equally deprived of security for personal liberty. Cowper, in a more passionate strain, thus describes the cruelty of the Bastile: —

Thou shame to manhood, and opprobrious more
To France than all her losses and defeats,
Old or of later date, by sea or land,
Her house of bondage, worse than that of old
Which God avenged on Pharaoh, — the Bastile!
Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts!
Ye dungeons, and ye cages of despair,
That monarchs have supplied, from age to age,
With music such as suits their sovereign ears, —

* Young's Travels in France, vol. i. p. 532.

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The sighs and groans of miserable men!
There 's not an English heart that would not leap
To hear that ye were fallen at last; to know
That even our enemies, so oft employ'd
In forging chains for us, themselves were free.

* * * * *

There dwell the most forlorn of human-kind;
Immured, though unaccused, condemn'd untried,
Cruelly spared, and hopeless of escape!

* * * * *

To read engraven on the mouldy walls,
In staggering types, his predecessor's tale,
A sad memorial, and subjoin his own —
To turn purveyor to an overgorged
And bloated spider, till the pamper'd pest
Is made familiar, watches his approach,
Comes at his call, and serves him for a friend —
To wear out time in numbering to and fro
The studs that thick emboss his iron door —

* * * * *

That man should thus encroach on fellow-man,
Abridge him of his just and native rights,
Eradicate him, tear him from his hold
Upon the endearments of domestic life
And social, nip his fruitfulness and use,
And doom him, for perhaps a heedless word,
To barrenness, and solitude, and tears,
Moves indignation; makes the name of king
(Of king whom such prerogative can please)
As dreadful as the Manichean god,
Adored through fear, strong only to destroy.

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CHAP. II.

THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE PEOPLE.

The government of the kingdom of France was of an irregular and unstable nature: there were old institutions, covered with the rust of time, without obtaining the respect paid to antiquity; oppressive privileges, no longer in harmony with the temper of the times; and a general tendency to improvement among the people, unaccompanied by any reform of abuses in the administration.

The first authority in the monarchy, next to the sovereign, was the parliament. This body, composed at first of clerks, summoned to assist the illiterate nobles of the days of St. Lewis, had become a part of the constitution of the state. It had aspired, during the monarchy of Lewis XIV., at a station of independence between the king and people. But having its source in the crown, and not in the people, this struggle had ended, after a parody of civil

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war, in the complete subjection of the parliament. But a permanent body preserves the memory of their privileges; and when the great king was dead, the parliament recollected that they had a right of remonstrance before placing the royal edicts on their records. This pretension led to many contests between the crown and the parliament, which have lost their interest from the absorbing importance of the times which followed. It was seldom that these disputes had an origin of much consequence to the people; and the result was never to their benefit. But they served for the time to keep up some appearance of freedom; and the language used in the French parliament was, at times, not unworthy of an English House of Commons.

The parliament was composed of men who obtained their seats by purchase; and, as the savings of the holder were generally employed to buy the reversion for his son, the highest judicial offices became, in fact, hereditary, upon the payment of a fine. Yet we should be mistaken if we concluded that this venality of offices produced the bad effects which would at first sight be supposed. It is in the

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nature of abuses in the political body, as of chronic diseases in the physical, to adapt themselves in some degree to the constitution. The nobility of the long robe formed, in France, a distinct caste; generation after generation were bred up in the traditionary maxims of the courts; and although the individuals must have been in many cases unfit, yet, as a whole, they probably did their duty better than the same number of persons chosen by court influence or office intrigue would have done. Certain feelings of honour; a kind of chivalrous pride in maintaining their dignity, — as remote as possible, indeed, from our abstract notions of judicial gravity, but still respectable,—influenced a great part of the members of the supreme parliament. They were, as we shall afterwards see, indifferent judges; but they formed an assembly united together by a zeal for their privileges, which, if it did not suffice to give France freedom, still preserved her from the absolute level of despotism. The misfortune was, that this spirit was of scarcely any practical use: the profligacy of the court was not checked; the abuses in the administration were not corrected; even the

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defects of justice were not remedied by the independent conduct of the parliament. The only advantage derived from their repeated struggles consisted in the maintenance of a class of men bred to feelings of resistance on lawful grounds, from whom the nation at some future time might learn a lesson, and improve its application.

The church was still a very powerful body, and had in a considerable degree the direction of the public mind. But their violent persecution of opinions, and lax toleration of vices, in an age of free enquiry, when public opinion was becoming every day stronger, loosened their hold on the respect of the people. They seemed never to overlook an error of doctrine, or to perceive a fault in morals. The Protestants, the Jansenists, the unbelievers, felt in turn their rancorous hostility. These persecutions, carried on in a peaceful age, were not marked by the atrocities of the two former centuries: but while, for that reason, they are less revolting, the absurdity and littleness displayed in them makes them still more disgusting. A short specimen of these troubles may suffice to give a notion of them.

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The legislation of Lewis XIV., so far as it regarded the Protestants, had been not only bigotted and cruel, but absurd and contradictory. Two religious parties divided his court: the one, the party of the Jesuits, proposed to convert the Protestants by force, but to allow a nominal conversion, and, satisfied with apparent uniformity, not to enquire too deeply into the sincerity of the new converts. The Jansenists were shocked at this worldly scheme, and offered another plan, by which the Huguenots were to be tutored, catechised, and thoroughly persuaded before they were admitted into the bosom of the church. Consistently with this plan, a certain toleration was to be granted for the ease of consciences upon which instruction should be found unavailing. The monarch, intent upon saving his soul, and ignorant to a strange degree of religion and its duties, tried each of these plans successively: when he acted on the Jesuit plan, the Jansenists represented to him the scandal of concealed heretics receiving the holy communion; when he pursued the advice of the Jansenists, the Jesuits pointed out to him that he was still far from the uniformity of religion

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which was to be his passport to Paradise: — hence his laws were full of the contradictions of the opposite parties. But in the next reign the origin of these discrepancies was forgotten; and when the Duke of Bourbon, unable to regulate his conduct by any rule of morals, and thinking to atone for his vices by persecution, consolidated and re-enacted the laws of the late king regarding heretics, his ministers formed a code doubly cruel from its absurdity. The Protestants were to be forced into the church by one clause; while, by the next, they were not to be admitted till they were thoroughly converted. The unhappy sectaries were worse treated than ever. No longer permitted to pretend an outward conformity, according to the Jesuit plan, or to obtain a tacit toleration if unconverted, according to the Jansenist plan, they were repelled from the church with one hand as imperfect converts, and scourged with the other as Protestant recusants. During the life of Cardinal Fleury, however, his mild and conciliatory disposition suspended the sword thus sharpened for their destruction. A bigot in principle, but merciful in practice, he left the law as he found it,

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but interfered in each individual case to prevent oppression.

Upon the death of Fleury the storm raged anew. The decision of a provincial tribunal on an incidental question brought an addition of calamity to the Protestants. The tribunal of Nismes in deciding a criminal cause, and without any authority in civil matters, pronounced that the marriages of Protestants were void in law. The chancellor was at this time preparing a decree on the subject, but, for some reason or other, the intention was dropped; the decision of the court of Nismes was allowed to be good, and hundreds of thousands of married persons were pronounced to be living in a state of concubinage. Many sought to reconcile themselves nominally to the church; but the Jesuit party had now adopted the policy of the Jansenists, and refused to admit them without such proofs of sincere recantation as they were unable to give. The chancellor d'Aguesseau wisely observed:—"The church must relax her vigour by some palliative; or, if she thinks herself bound not to do so, she must cease to ask the king to force his subjects to what is impossible, by com-

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manding them to fulfil a religious duty which the church does not allow them to perform." But his wisdom ended here—he proposed no amendment, and things grew worse. For a long time Protestant mothers had confided their children to Catholic women to obtain church baptism: but the *curés* now inserted in their registers an entry blasting the fame of the mothers; and the last tie which held the Protestants to the rest of society was broken. The extremity of distress armed the sufferers with new courage. In the year 1744 this unfortunate sect, so often persecuted, and still so vigorous, gave fresh signs of life by renewing their field meetings, called "meetings in the desert." At these meetings there were sometimes assembled 20,000 persons, of both sexes, of every age, and every rank. On these occasions their ministers administered baptism, solemnised marriages, made collections for the poor, preached on the duties of this life, and the hope of another. In order to avoid any offence to authority, the faithful were ordered to attend without arms; and a sermon was preached at least once every year on the text of St. Paul enjoining obedience

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and submission to the ordinance of man. These assemblies were held in the open day, near some town or large village, and were attended by the merchants and gentlemen of the Protestant faith, without concealment, or exclusion of priest or officer. But all this candour and tranquillity could not disarm bigotry of its bloody fangs: the fanatic church could not bear that men of a different persuasion should have any liberty of conscience; and when the clergy applied to the king, the court was too happy to atone for its wanton neglect of every moral duty, by offering to the mask of religion the persecution of the innocent and the just. Troops were sent into the provinces to disperse by force assemblies which used no force: the rich lost their property; the pastors were sent to the gallies; the married women were declared to be prostitutes, and their children illegitimate: wherever a Protestant was to be seen, soldiers were quartered, and blood flowed. An officer commanding in a great province, of singular humanity, inserted in his instructions this clause: —"It will be right to order the commanding officers of detachments to delay firing as long as

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possible on those who do not defend themselves." The prisons were filled with persons accused of no other crime than of having been present at the field-meetings. In Languedoc, where it was impossible to imprison, on account of their number, any large proportion of the Protestants, twenty-eight persons, including a gentleman's family, two officers, and a physician, were sent to the gallies bound together with the chain of malefactors. In some parts of the country fines and confiscation prevailed; but the parliaments of Grenoble and Bordeaux (of which last Montesquieu was a member!) condemned those brought before them to the gallies. A fresh emigration took place, and many who fled carried away considerable property. Those who remained were separated, not only from religious, but from civil society. Their marriages, their baptisms, and, in consequence, their succession to property, and their titles to civil rights, were not acknowledged in the tribunals of France. After the peace of 1763 active persecution ceased; but there remained, down to the reign of Lewis XVI., a million of Protestant subjects

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thus outlawed, in the midst of a country which their ancestors had inhabited for centuries.* They remained, however, the natural enemies of the church, which had persecuted, and of the government, which had disavowed them; they at least could lose nothing by a change.

In the early part of the reign of Lewis XV. the Jansenists were still a powerful sect, and acquired additional credit from the severities directed against them. A weak-minded enthusiast, of this sect, called the deacon Paris, attracted great admiration by his saintly life; and after his death the vulgar crowded to his tomb, where numerous miracles were said to be performed. Credulity is catching; the higher orders joined in the delusion; and a man of talents and learning, who went to scoff, was so convinced, that he wrote a book to support the miracles of the Jansenist saint. At length the nuisance came to be so intolerable, that the king ordered the place to be shut up. Some free-thinking wit concluded the whole

* Rulhière, Eclaircissemens Hist.

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affair by writing upon the gate this couplet, in ridicule of both parties: —

De par le roi, défense à Dieu
De faire miracle dans ce lieu. *

New dissensions sprang up, in consequence of what has been supposed to be an attempt of the Jesuits to introduce a species of inquisition in France. In 1746 Beaumont, Archbishop of Paris, ordered that no persons should receive the sacrament on their deathbed, nor even Christian burial, unless they could produce a paper called a *billet de confession*, attesting that they had confessed to, and received absolution from, a priest approved of by him; or, in other words, an adherent of the bull Unigenitus. Although the archbishop affirmed that he had found the order established in his metropolitan see before he came into possession, its execution produced effects at this time which had never before been heard of. The clergyman of St. Etienne-du-Mont, who had formerly been a Jansenist, displayed the peculiar zeal of a convert in persecuting his flock. After some

* "The king commands that God shall not
Work miracles upon this spot."

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inferior exercises of his power, he found an illustrious victim in Coffin, the principal of the college of Beauvais, and successor of the celebrated Rollin. Coffin was a very pious and worthy man, who had written hymns for the church service. When enjoined upon his death-bed to retract his Jansenist opinions, he resolutely declined to comply, and died without receiving the sacrament. The curé of St. Etienne refused to inter his body; and it was only by the courage and importunity of his nephew that the remains of an excellent Catholic obtained Christian burial. But the nephew himself fell dangerously ill six months afterwards: the same priest refused the sacrament to him, as he had done to his uncle; and hastened his end by the pain and disquiet of so barbarous an hostility. The parliament summoned the *curé*, and ordered him to be arrested: he refused to answer, and pleaded the orders of his superiors. The Archbishop of Paris justified his conduct, declaring that the practice of demanding *billets de confession* had been first adopted as a means of extirpating the heresy of the Protestants, and that it had since been employed with success

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against the opponents of the bull. The parliament condemned the *curé* of Saint Etienne to pay three livres in alms, and ordered him not to refuse the sacrament for the future: but the king's council annulled the judgment, and left the clergy to continue their fanatical proceedings. The clergy proceeded, therefore, in their attack upon the consciences of the nation. The *curé* of Saint Etienne soon found an illustrious object for his holy zeal in the person of the Duke of Orleans, who, after a life spent in the most austere exercises of religion, and the most strict observance of moral duties, was dying in the monastery of St. Geneviêve. The priest forced his way to his bed-side, called upon him to renounce his Jansenist faith, and, on his refusal, denied him the communion. The prince, with equal sense and charity, desired that no notice might be taken of the scandal, and received the sacrament from the hands of his own chaplain. The busy priest, however, soon found a new opportunity of signalising his sincere bigotry or hypocritical ambition.

A clergyman who had once been chaplain of the Abbess of Chelles died in his parish: he

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was a Jansenist, and the *curé* took the opportunity to excommunicate him on his death-bed. Upon this occasion all the chambers of the parliament assembled; a second order was given for the arrest of the *curé;* and the parliament took a still more decided step, by declaring that the bull was not an article of faith. This declaration was to the highest degree popular: more than 10,000 copies were sold. The council annulled the declaration; and the high church became still more furious in maintaining their persecutions. All over France the pulpit resounded with sermons against the parliament; in all the courts of justice the tribunals were occupied with orders to arrest the clergy who had thus preached. One *curé*, of the environs of Paris, was condemned to perpetual banishment by the parliament, for attacking their body as atheists in the presence of several of its members. Another *curé* was condemned to pay 3000 francs to two young women, to whom, in giving the sacrament, he had said, "I give you the communion as Jesus gave it to Judas." It may easily be imagined, from this trait, how great was the violence excited by this dispute: the beds of

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the dying were disturbed by invectives, anathemas, and every kind of outrage. At Orleans, at Auxerre, and at Langres, the dead were left for several days without burial; women who attended the hospitals were displaced for their attachment to Jansenism; and the kindest duties of charity, the most consoling offices of religion, the dearest affections of nature, were all suspended and perverted because the majority of the priesthood of France could not bear to tolerate any difference of opinion on a metaphysical question of great subtilty, on which the church had chosen to dogmatise. This affair, however, had a comic as well as a tragic side; it was made the subject of plays written by theologians, and, what was probably more amusing, it was celebrated in couplets, which were sung by the people in the streets of Paris.

At length the parliament of Paris made an attack upon the archbishop, the source of all the disorders. A nun of the convent of St. Agatha, called sister Perpetua, eager to show her zeal for Jansenism, feigned herself dangerously ill, and sent for a *curé*, who refused her the communion. The archbishop approved

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of the conduct of the *curé*: the parliament condemned them both, and sequestrated the revenue of the archbishop. The Count d'Argenson, whose advice to the king was, to beware of the encroachments of the parliament, caused the nun to be carried off. The parliament assembled and convoked the peers. The king forbade the peers to attend the parliament. The parliament met, however; and the discussions were stamped with the spirit of free enquiry that marked the character of the age. The Abbé de Chauvelin, an eloquent and able chief of opposition, went so far as to propose discussing the legality of *lettres de cachet*: remonstrances in the strongest terms were drawn up; the king refused to hear them: the parliament declared that they would remain assembled till the truth should arrive at the foot of the throne. New orders, called *lettres de jussion*, were sent by the king: the parliament answered that they could not obey without being wanting to their duty and their oaths. The king was much incensed at this obstinate disobedience: he had, for a long time, seen with indifference the contest between the parliament and the clergy; and Madame

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de Pompadour, herself in doubt, had rather leant to the parliament: but her views were completely altered when she heard that, in the warm debates of the chambers, her own august person had not been spared. Throwing her weight into the scale, the balance, which had so long hung even, inclined to the clergy; and this state question was determined by her feminine resentments. All the members of two of the chambers were exiled, and the great chamber alone was commissioned to distribute justice in France. Four magistrates were conducted as state prisoners to different places of confinement.

These steps, however, instead of crushing, served only to irritate the opposition in the parliament; its members bound themselves by oaths not to desert one another: the great chamber refused to act. The whole chamber was then exiled, and a new tribunal appointed; but the disorder continued; and the court was glad to put an end to this disagreeable affair by taking advantage of the birth of the Duke de Berri, afterwards Lewis XVI., which happened in August, 1754, to make peace with the parliament. The Cardinal de la Roche-

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foucault, the mediator in the negotiation, promised to engage the bishops not to insist any longer upon the *billet de confession.* On the other side, Machault, the comptroller-general, was obliged to exchange the department of finances for that of the marine; and the parliament consented to register an edict which prescribed an absolute silence on matters of religion. Tranquillity was restored: the people felt, and the court affected, great joy; but the Jesuits, and the whole high church party, who had lately displayed immoderate triumph at the rigorous measures of the king, fell into the extreme of depression. They endeavoured to renew the contest; but the archbishop was exiled; more peaceful thoughts began to prevail; and moderation was much assisted among the clergy by the death of the bishop who disposed of ecclesiastical patronage, and the nomination of a more tolerant prelate.

All these dissensions, which seemed to rise and subside without a cause, prove the extreme weakness of the government which allowed them to continue so long. The pope was so struck with the apathy of the sovereign power, and the tranquillity that prevailed with-

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out any compressing force of authority, that he exclaimed, — "What a good machine! it goes by itself!" It is not with impunity, however, that a government allows its power to fall into hands which usurp it for the purposes of satisfying private or corporate hatreds; nor was it without danger that the crown allowed these disputes to become openly disgusting or ridiculous: the clergy were the offenders, but religion was the sufferer.

Such were the powerful bodies which shared with the king the government of France. Let us now observe the working of the machine in those two most essential parts, the administration of justice, and the levying of taxes. "I have, in conversation with many very sensible men," says Arthur Young, "in different parts of the kingdom, met with something of content with their government in all other respects than this; but, upon the question of expecting justice to be really and fairly administered, every one confessed there was no such thing to be looked for." * Besenval complains that the judges were open to bribery and corruption. "The best cause," he says,

* Young, vol. i. p. 537.

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" cannot give confidence to one who seeks for reparation, or protection to a man accused as a criminal. If his adversary is powerful, or has favour, he is condemned." The same writer asserts that it was still more hazardous to have any lawsuit in which a judge was a party concerned. " How many unhappy proprietors," he cries, " have been deprived of their inheritance only because the property was convenient to a member of the parliament who has had it adjudged to him, by a sentence as iniquitous as the action brought by him was profligate!"* Besides the great and irretrievable fault of corruption, the people had to suffer from the oppression exercised by judges dependent on the seigneur. These were men of low education, holding their courts in wine-houses, where they made use of their delegated power to involve the parties that came before them in bottomless expenses, endless appeals, and all those various frauds by which the distribution of justice between man and man, instead of being the greatest benefit, is made one of the most smarting evils of society.

* Mémoires, vol. ii. p. 152.

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The mode of trial, and the severity of the laws, were still as much open to objection as they had been for centuries before. Montesquieu pointed out the evil, but it lay not with him to correct it.

After the administration of justice, the most important relation which connects a government with its subjects is the distribution and collection of taxes. The manner in which this great concern was managed in France may convince us that it formed a system of oppression, unparalleled perhaps in any Christian state of Europe. The taxes may be comprehended under the three heads of direct taxes, the excise, and the customs. To these are to be added the corvées and other seignorial rights. Under the head of direct taxes, the chief were the *taille*, the *capitation*, and the *vingtième*. All persons who were noble were exempted from the payment of the taille: "*Noble n'est tenu payer la taille, ni faire vile corvée*," says Loiseau. The number of families exempted under this title amounted to about 200,000. There were numerous offices, moreover, which gave a privilege of exemption from this burthensome tax. One

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of these, the most commonly disposed of for money, the office of secretary to the king, gave occasion to some one to remark, "What a pity it is that Adam did not buy the office of secretary to the king; we should have been all noble!" The tax, being thus made to bear invidiously upon the poor and the humble, was aggravated by the manner of its distribution. For this purpose the kingdom was divided into generalities; at the head of each was an intendant appointed by the crown, who had supreme authority in all matters of finance. The generalities were subdivided into elections; at the head of each was a sub-delegate, appointed by the intendant. The rolls of the *taille*, *capitation*, *vingtièmes*, and other taxes, were distributed among districts, parishes, and individuals, at the pleasure of the intendant, who could exempt, change, add, or diminish at pleasure. It is undeniable that such an arrangement could not but lead to the grossest oppressions, by which the revenue and the people would equally be sufferers: but, besides the manifest tendency of such a system, its injustice and pernicious effects are proved by the

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clearest evidence. Colbert made a benevolent regulation, that the cattle of the poor husbandman should not be seized for the payment of the taille; but it does not appear that the spirit of his orders was observed after his death. The Duke of Orleans, upon coming to the regency, wrote a circular letter to the intendants, in which he stated as well known facts, that the receivers had their own allowance paid before the taille due to the government; that "many of them employed their authority rather to protect the rich than to relieve the poor;" that the receivers and other officers of elections were in league; that they protected their friends and relations; "that they exercised vengeance against those whom they disliked; that they seized the cattle, beds, clothes, and tools of labourers and artisans; that the officers of jurisdictions, and other powerful persons, exercised an authority over the collectors, to procure for themselves and their tenants moderate assessments, and placed the tax on others: thence," continues the regent, "has resulted the failure of the tax, and the ruin of the people." The regent ordered this letter to be printed and

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sent to every parish; but the result was not so happy as might have been expected.* Indeed, we may be assured that the evils here complained of were not remedied, as we find the very same statements in a remonstrance of the Court of Aids, dated the 14th of September, 1756. It is there asserted with confidence, that the part of the vingtièmes especially, which was not levied upon fixed incomes, fell exclusively upon trade and industry; that the daily labourer was left at the mercy of the arbitrary decisions of the subalterns employed under the intendants. In addition to all other evils, they add, that the cognizance of revenue causes had been taken away from the regular tribunals; and that no alternative had been left to subjects who thought themselves injured, but either to submit to an unjust tax, or to appeal to the person who is the author of it, by demanding of him to reform his own work. Hence, they assert, have arisen vexations of the most odious nature, and abuses of the most flagrant description. The Court of Aids complained, at the same time, of the creation of irregular tribunals, established upon the fron-

* Forbonnais, vol. v. p. 242—248.

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tiers of the kingdom, to judge of offences relative to the customs. They pointed out two very grievous effects of this system: "on the one hand, the terror which these irregular tribunals spread among the people; and, on the other, the great number of sanguinary executions which have been made under their authority since their creation. The necessity of putting a stop to smuggling has been the pretence for these formidable establishments. Let us judge, from recent instances, whether this practice is put a stop to, or even decreased, in your dominions."

Next to the direct taxes comes the *gabelle*, or salt tax. The regulations by which the collection of this tax was levied were arbitrary and oppressive in the extreme. All persons, even the poorest, were obliged to buy a certain quantity of salt, amounting to 7 lbs. a head per annum: they were not allowed to receive any more, even as a gift, under penalties that amounted to total ruin. The person who dealt in the article was forbidden to sell it out of certain limits; every family was obliged to employ their salt in cookery, and the daily consumption of the kitchen,

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unless by special permission. If the cultivator happened to have too much salt, he was not allowed to dispose of it as he pleased: in Normandy only eight *salines* were allowed to be at work on the same day, and the quantity of salt in each was limited. The herring fishery was altogether ruined by these provisions. The execution of the law was still worse than its enactments: the rich generally bought an exemption; parishes were made responsible for the conduct of their inhabitants, and in some, the quantity of salt allowed to be consumed in the parish was arbitrarily fixed; the most dreadful punishments were enacted in order to maintain the observance of the tyrannical edicts of the ministers and their deputies. Smugglers of salt, armed and assembled to the number of five, incurred capital punishment, except in Provence, where they were liable to nine years of the galleys: smugglers armed and assembled, but in number under five, incurred three years of the galleys; and for the second offence ten: smugglers who carried the salt on their backs, without arms, a fine of 200 livres; and for the second offence six years of the galleys: women and

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children who smuggled were liable, for the first offence, to a fine of 100 livres; for the second 300 livres; and for the third, were flogged, and banished the kingdom for life. The husbands were responsible for the women, the fathers and mothers for the children, even to the suffering corporal punishment for them. It was calculated that, upon an average, there were annually taken up and imprisoned 2340 men, 896 women, 201 children,—total 3347. Three hundred of these were annually sent to the galleys. *

If we consider next the commerce of the country, both internal and foreign, we shall find that it was placed under the worst management. There were forty farmers-general of the customs, and 400 persons interested in what were called the sub-farms. † These places were all sold. An office in the finance returned sometimes 60, and even 90 per cent.; in the worst times they gave 15 per cent.: the average was 35. ‡ Of course speculators preferred this high gain to every other species of traffic. There was no end to the vex-

* Forbonnais, iii. p. 166. 168. 171. Young, i. p. 534.
† Ibid. vol. iii. p. 199. ‡ Ibid. vol. ii. p. 316.

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ations and usurpations put in force by these men; the duties were different in every different place. In Normandy alone, Havre, Dieppe, and Rouen had different regulations with respect to the commerce of wine. At Havre the duties were the same, whether the wine were exported or consumed in the place; at Dieppe, wine intended to be exported could only be kept six weeks; at Rouen, a heavy duty was paid for transit.* Very often the farmers-general levied new duties by their own authority: the commerce of cattle between Poictou and Bretagne was disturbed by a duty of sixteen sous for every pair of oxen, and thirty-one for every cow, not authorised by any law. The fair of Beaucaire was deserted in consequence of illegal duties of the same description.† The five farms, or contracts, which composed the customs were, in themselves, extremely complicated. The ordinances and regulations on the subject of these five great farms were so multiplied, that their titles alone filled twelve quarto volumes.‡ Regulations so voluminous in-

* Forbonnais, vol. iii. p. 154. † Ibid. vol. ii. p. 290.
‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 234.

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evitably produced a great deal of litigation: in the time of Colbert a commission was established to settle the disputes between the collectors and the merchants; after his death it seems to have dropped. We have seen that the Court of Aids complained of the erection of new tribunals in the provinces: these generally consisted of a single magistrate; and the persons holding this situation were usually needy men, who obtained their chief means of livelihood from the bribes of the farmers-general.* The clerks of the farmers-general who were guilty of extortion or fraud were scarcely ever punished, and were even spared restitution, in order to save the honour of the company.†

We have seen that all the regulations of the French finance tended to favour the noble and the rich, and to oppress the penurious labourer. But this was especially the case with one class of burthens; namely, the customs or laws by which the tenant was bound to work for others. The corvées were of two kinds, called public and private, as they were due to the government or to indi-

* Forbonnais, vol. ii. p. 282. † Ibid. vol. iv. p. 12.

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viduals: those due to individuals comprehended every sort of labour, being sometimes an obligation to bring carts, or horses, or mules; sometimes to assist in the vintage, or in reaping, mowing, or repairing roads or bridges by personal labour. In the corvées, as in the tailles, there was the distinction of personal and real: from the personal the clergy and nobles were exempt; the real were due by the lands, whoever might be the possessor. Sometimes these services were fixed; sometimes they were at the discretion of the lord, both as to the time and the quantity of labour required: decisions of courts of law had ruled, however, that more than twelve days could not be demanded. The public corvées chiefly regarded the roads; and the time and manner of performing the labour seem to have been at the option of the contributor.

It is not necessary to point out that these base services were a most inconvenient and wasteful employment of labour; that they were vexatious to the farmers and peasantry, and excited a lively hatred of the system of law to which they belonged. It is just to say, however, that the courts of law restrained this

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right as much as they could, and required an indisputable title before they would allow it to be put in force.

Such being the imposts and exactions to which the French people were liable, it is not surprising to find that they lived in a state of fear, suspicion, and wretchedness.

"Your best way is to come through France," writes Dr. Berkeley in 1714; "but make no long stay there, for the air is too cold, and there are instances enough of poverty and distress to spoil the mirth of any one who feels the sufferings of his fellow-creatures. The king, indeed, looks as though he wanted neither meat nor drink, and his palaces are in good repair; but throughout the land there is a different face of things." * But the most striking picture of the state of the country people is to be found in Rousseau, who relates in his "Confessions" an incident that occurred to him in a journey to Lyons. He had left the common road, and slept at the house of a peasant, to satisfy the hunger he had gained by a long walk. — "After many hours of needless fatigue," to tell the story in his own

* Berkeley's Works.

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words, " tired, and dying of hunger and thirst, I entered the house of a peasant, which had not a very good appearance, but was the only one I could see near me. I imagined it was there, as at Geneva and in Switzerland, where all the inhabitants who live at their ease are able to exercise hospitality. I asked the master of the house to give me dinner, for which I would pay. He offered me skim milk and coarse barley bread, saying it was all he had. I drank the milk with delight, and ate the bread, straw and all; but such a meal was not nourishing enough to restore a man exhausted by fatigue. The peasant, who observed me, judged of the truth of my story by that of my appetite. He immediately, after saying that he saw I was a good young man, who did not come to betray him, opened a little trap-door by the side of his kitchen, descended, and came back directly with good brown bread, made entirely of wheat; a ham that looked very tempting, though already begun upon; and a bottle of wine, the sight of which rejoiced my heart more than all the rest: he added to this a large omelette; and I made a dinner such as pedestrian never made

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before. When it came to the time of payment, his uneasiness and his fears were renewed: he would not have my money: he rejected it with a singular degree of trouble; and I could not imagine what affected him so much. At last he pronounced the terrible words of—officers of the customs, and excisemen. He gave me to understand that he hid his wine on account of the customs; that he hid his bread on account of the *taille;* and that he should be ruined if it were suspected that he was not dying of hunger! What he said to me was the germ of that hatred which was afterwards developed in my heart against the vexations this unhappy people experience, and against their oppressors. This man, though in easy circumstances, did not dare to eat the bread he had gained by the sweat of his brow, and could only escape ruin by displaying the same misery as his neighbours. I left his house equally indignant and affected, deploring the lot of this fine country, on which nature has bestowed her gifts only to make them the prey of the barbarous tax-gatherer." * It must not be forgotten, that

* Confessions, part i. book 4.

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one of the chief purposes for which these taxes were raised was to furnish supplies for the expense of the seraglio at Versailles, and the entertainments by which Madame de Pompadour endeavoured to relieve the languor in which long habits of debauchery had sunk the voluptuous monarch.

Let us here sum up, in a few words, what has been said of the state of the kingdom. A nobility, disfigured by every vice, and possessing scarcely any virtue but courage, were privileged to insult and maltreat the people whose burdens they did not share. The tribunals were filled with persons who bought the power of administering justice, and very generally sold it to the clients who appeared at their bar. The most outrageous violations of all the rules of equity, the most barbarous methods of enquiry and of punishment, were revered and hallowed by the government as the established forms of law. A small portion of the nation, divided from the rest, enjoyed all the patronage of the court, held the command of armies and the richest benefices in the church, and were seldom punished for any crime they committed. At the same time,

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their exemption from taxes did not prevent them from involving themselves in debt; and they exhibited to their countrymen the want of principle which is the cause, the recklessness which is the companion, and the embarrassment and poverty which are the consequences, of vice. On the other hand, the people were rendered thoroughly wretched by the vexations to which they were subject from the government and their landlords. Their misery proceeded from the arbitrary nature of every power in the state: the taxes were arbitrary; the administration of justice arbitrary; even their labour was controlled by arbitrary authority. Growing in importance, and struggling through all their difficulties into prosperity and comfort, their social condition improved, while their political condition remained stationary. They formed a mass long inert, and apparently lifeless; but the "matter of sedition" was abundant among them, and required only stirring to make it blaze at once into a flame.

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CHAP. III.

THE PROGRESS OF PUBLIC OPINION.

In the preceding pages enough has been related of the vices of the government, and the degradation of the people, to convince any reasonable man that so faulty a system could not be of long duration. It was certain that, as the community increased in wealth and knowledge, they would require better security for their property in general, and a more just distribution of that part of it which they surrendered for the purposes of internal justice and external safety.

It was the fatal error of the French rulers, that they permitted wealth and knowledge to increase without attempting to adapt their institutions to the altered state of the nation. Two historians, who, with very unequal merit, have undertaken to relate the fall of the English government under Charles I., and of the French under Lewis XVI., have both com-

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menced their works with florid descriptions of the prosperity and riches of the respective nations at the commencement of the troubles. But, instead of leaving a reproach on the people, who are thus represented as rushing wantonly into civil war, they should have gone on to exhibit, on the other hand, the state of the government. Hence they would have arrived at the inevitable conclusion, that a government so arbitrary, so unjust, so unequal, could not long subsist in a nation so powerful, so active, and so enlightened.

It has been said indeed, long ago, that the true interest of a tyrant is to make his people poor and ignorant. The Stuarts in England and the Bourbons in France could not employ this only means of safety, and their fall was the natural result.

Such was the state of France during the reign of Lewis XV. that one of two results was inevitable:—either a general corruption would infect the whole nation, and the French monarchy would undergo the fate of ancient Greece and Rome, and modern Italy and Spain; or else it would acquire a new spirit, and advance to new institutions. At this

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crisis there arose a set of writers who gave a new direction to the national energy; and to this circumstance has been attributed all the subsequent calamities. Yet whatever evils the French may have suffered from adopting mistaken and unfounded theories, there can be no doubt that she owes her freedom, and perhaps her independence, to those very men of letters who are now the theme of so much invective: and much as we may lament the delusive doctrines which prevailed, and the cruel wars which sprung from the contest between those doctrines and the old principles, yet, without such a contest, this great country would have resembled the nations that have sunk the deepest, from glory in letters and in arms, to vice, apathy, and servitude.

There is a principle of life in modern governments which antiquity never knew. In Greece and Rome all the citizens, alike poor, were at first the virtuous supports of free institutions; but, as wealth and luxury advanced, all grew alike corrupt, and the needy multitude were swayed by the opulent few. In modern monarchies the progress has been very different.

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The wretched dependants of feudal times were converted, with the increase of wealth, into the substantial yeomanry and tradesmen. Into these powerful but inert masses were thrown, from the printing press, the animating sparks of historical instruction and political intelligence. Where works of genius, on the subjects of law and liberty, are generally diffused, there arises a new spirit of virtue, which corrects the rancid corruption of a decaying government. In proportion as the middle and lower classes rise in knowledge they rise in importance, and judge of their masters by the test of their own worth. Not having been corrupted by power, their standard of what is right in government is much higher than that of the ruling classes. A new people come to the surface, and obtain an influence over the destiny of their country. An awful tribunal is erected even in the midst of a corrupted society; and the members of the most vicious order begin to bend before public opinion. The minds of men are cleared — public character is submitted to the ordeal of shame or approbation; and that lethargy of a state which

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is the sure forerunner of dissolution is effectually prevented.

Such was, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the influence of the great writers in France. Far be it from us to say that they directed in the wisest manner the minds of which they obtained the government. It is to these points, — the origin, the progress, the doctrines, and the influence of the philosophers, as they are called, — that we must now direct our attention; for, in the eighteenth century, the history of letters is the history of the state.

The transition from the age of Lewis XIV. to that of his grandson is to be perceived in the literary character of Fénélon. Fénélon united the merits of both without the defects of either; he was decent, classical, and correct as Racine; he had the spirit of freedom and love of mankind which warm the pages of Montesquieu and Rousseau. Without any very philosophical, or any very practical, notions of liberty, his heart taught him to value the rights of mankind; and he earnestly counselled his pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, to call the States General together upon his

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accession to the throne. His writings, both public and private, breathe a generous ardour in the cause of oppressed and suffering humanity, which is strangely at variance with the selfish and arbitrary principles of the court. His moral conduct was not only above reproach, but marked by a degree of abstinence for himself, and charity towards others, which nothing but a high enthusiasm for his duties could have rendered natural: in any other man the world would have suspected affectation; in him there was no thought concealed, no room for detraction to fix its fangs. But while the life was blameless, the doctrine of the archbishop was not so. His fondness for ecstacy and transport led him to allow privileges to enthusiasm, which neither the Court of Rome could sanction, nor sober reason can approve. Malignity and theological hatred excited Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, to attack him with argument, with virulence, with intrigue. A long and persevering hostility, carried on at Versailles and at Rome, at length brought down on Fénélon the humiliation of a papal censure. The pope, however, said in private, with equal compassion and truth, "Fénélon has erred from

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having too much of the love of God: Bossuet has sinned from not having enough of the love of his neighbour." Fénélon received this blow with the deepest submission: never did his candour and self-denial shine forth more apparent.

Space and opportunity are wanting for the justice due to a man on whose character any writer might delight to dwell. Nor shall I here paint the feeling and simplicity of Massillon, who, were it not that he assisted at the consecration of Dubois, might be held up as a model of pure and Christian virtue. But our business is with men of another temper.

Montesquieu is the first of the men of letters of the eighteenth century of whom we shall speak. He was, in fact, the man who threw the first stone at the monarchy of France. When about twenty-six years of age he published, in 1721, against the advice of his friends, that agreeable compound of satire and fiction, deep reflection and light composition, called "The Persian Letters." The epigrammatic turn of expression, and the interest of the story, excited general attention, and made this one of the most popular works that ever ap-

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peared. The "Grandeur et Décadence des Romains," a most profound and ingenious theory of the progress of that wise and great people, was his next work.

The publication of the "Esprit des Lois," in 1748, may be considered as forming an epoch in the history of Europe. Montesquieu revealed to mankind great principles of justice and freedom, which it had been the aim of despotic monarchies to conceal or to explode. He showed in a pointed and forcible manner those truths which others, indeed, had discovered, but which most of the nations of Europe had long neglected. He proscribed, by short but incontrovertible reasonings, many practices, such as torture and arbitrary imprisonment, which, however barbarous, were supposed necessary to the maintenance of government. He laid before his readers an analysis of the methods by which men are ruled; and it was impossible for any one to follow him and not, like him, take the part of liberty against slavery, of humanity against torture, of knowledge against ignorance, of virtue against corruption. Despotism, like vice, "to be hated, needs but to be seen." Montes-

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quieu placed it in the pillory, and it was greeted by the execrations of mankind.

This is the real merit of the "Esprit des Lois." As a theory, it is extremely defective. It is impossible to assent to the master proposition, that fear is the principle of a despotism, honour of a monarchy, and virtue of a republic. A despotism may be founded, like any other government, on the passions and affections of its subjects. To the Turks, for instance, the Turkish government is as good a government as they desire: they applaud the arbitrary executions, which in France or England would create rebellion. The principle of the Turkish government is religious and military fanaticism; and the methods by which it acts are conformable to the public opinion of Constantinople. The notion of the principle of honour in a monarchy applies chiefly, if not entirely, to the monarchies of France and Spain; it is the spirit of feudal society, and must not be extended to monarchies founded on any other basis. The assertion, that virtue is the principle of a republic, is so very vague, that it is impossible to assent to it. What is

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meant by virtue? Is it intended to say, that in a republic every thing is conducted virtuously? Is the same principle to be applied to all republics? Is the spirit that governed Athens and Venice to be confounded as one and the same? Are Carthage and Sparta, Geneva and the United States of America, Rome and Holland, to be all included in one description? Is it not manifest that the spirit of each is different in proportion as aristocracy or democracy, the spirit of commerce or of conquest, of religious freedom or a dogmatic faith, of increasing riches or prescribed poverty, reign in each?

Besides the vagueness and inaccuracy of this general theory, there is much useless matter in the work of Montesquieu: yet, faulty as it is, it is one of the best gifts which genius has bestowed upon mankind. The excess of point and antithesis, the affectation of making a chapter of a single sentence, the frequent and needless discussion of the manners and laws of Japan, are defects amply compensated by the sagacity of observation, the depth of analysis, the temperate tone of freedom, which breathe through and animate the work.

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Another author, of more potent name, was formed in the court of the regent. The licentious manners of that prince, his liberal opinions on government, his admiration of the English constitution, his entire scorn and mockery of religion, were all implanted in the mind and the passions of a man who was destined to influence deeply the fate of his country — Voltaire.

François Marie Arouet, the second son of François Arouet, was born at Châtenay, near Sceaux, on the 20th of February, 1694. He was so weak a child, that he was immediately baptized for fear of his life. His father, a notary at the châtelet, left him very much to the guidance of the Abbé de Châteauneuf, his godfather. He was sent, at ten years old, to the college or school of Louis le Grand, directed at that time by the Jesuits; but various sayings recorded of him prove that he grew in incredulity with his years. At sixteen Le Jay, professor of rhetoric, predicted that he would be "the standard of Deism in France." Another Jesuit, his confessor, said of him, — "This child is tormented by a thirst of fame." These sayings,

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if not invented afterwards, show the knowledge of character possessed by that celebrated order. When he left the Jesuits, his father sent him to the schools of law; but he was very soon disgusted with jurisprudence, and resolved in his own mind to give himself up to literature. The Abbé de Câhteauneuf introduced him to a select society of princes who loved letters, and authors who loved a good table. At the head of these were the Prince of Conti, the Duke of Vendôme, and his brother the grand prior, the Duke of Sully, the Marquis of La Fare, the Abbé de Chaulieu, and others. Here he learned the manners of good company; but was confirmed in his impiety by the applause with which every stroke of that nature was received. His father, to rescue him from this dangerous tuition, sent him to accompany the Marquis of Châteauneuf to Holland. His stay was not long; for, having acquired the affections of a daughter of the Madame Dunoyer, a French refugee lady, and being, upon the complaint of the mother, confined to the house of the embassy, he persuaded the young lady to visit him in boy's clothes.

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He was thereupon sent back to France, where, with singular effrontery, he proposed to the bishops and Jesuits to carry off his paramour from her heretic mother, in order to save her soul. This project failing, and his father being quite estranged by his conduct, young Arouet meditated a voyage to America; but his father relenting, he was sent to the office of a solicitor of the Rue Perdue. Here he learned little of the practice of pleading, but formed the acquaintance of Thiriot, who, for many years, was in the secret of his clandestine authorship.

Hitherto there seemed little prospect of advancement for this petulant wit; but he was shortly to be favoured with those two able nurses of talent — protection and persecution. M. de Caumartin, intendant of the finances, took him to his seat in the country, where M. de Caumartin's father still resided. From him Aronet heard many stories of Henry IV. and Sully, with whose companions the old gentleman had lived in his youth. Here there was laid the foundation of the "Henriade" and of the "Siècle de Louis XIV." Soon after this, a satire having appeared, called the "J'ai vu," written by Le Brun, Arouet,

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wrongly suspected of being the author of it, was sent to the Bastile. During an imprisonment of a year he made a sketch of his "Henriade," and completed the tragedy of "Œdipe." His innocence being at length acknowledged, he was released; and was waiting in the anti-chamber to be presented to the regent, when a dreadful storm burst over Paris. "Things could not be worse," exclaimed Arouet, "if they had a regency in heaven!" M. de Nocé told the story to the regent, with this preface, — "Monseigneur, allow me to present to your royal highness young Arouet, whom you have just released from the Bastile, and whom you are going to send back there." The regent laughed heartily at the joke, and promised Arouet a pension. "I thank your royal highness," he replied, "for taking charge of my board, but I will not trouble you in future to provide my lodging." Upon leaving the Bastile he changed the name of Arouet, which he said was unlucky, for that of Voltaire. Many conjectures have been made with respect to the origin of this name; the most plausible seems to be, that it is composed of the letters of his former signa-

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ture, Arouet L. J., for Arouet le Jeune. In 1718 appeared the tragedy of "Œdipe," which was received with warm approbation, and acted forty-five nights. Two verses in this tragedy, which would not have been tolerated under Lewis XIV., mark a new epoch in the history of France. They are to this day applauded by a Parisian audience.

"Les prêtres ne sont pas ce qu'un vain peuple pense,
Notre crédulité fait toute leur science."

Two years afterwards Voltaire accompanied Madame de Rupelmonde to Holland; and on his way paid a visit to the celebrated Jean Baptiste Rousseau, at Brussels. These two authors indulged in the perilous practice of reading their works to each other: Rousseau read his "Ode to Posterity," and asked his friend what he thought of it. "Since you ask me, my dear friend," replied Voltaire, "I fear it will never reach its destination." Rousseau, on the other hand, himself the author of many blasphemies, declared himself shocked at the impiety of Voltaire's "Epître à Uranie." They were never friends more. In the course of six years after the success of "Œdipe," Voltaire

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produced on the stage two tragedies, "Artémise" and "Mariamne," both of which failed: such was the caution and the checkered fortune of this great author in his first appearance before the world. An instance of his sensitive temper at the same period is, that having assembled some excellent critics at the house of the President de Maisons to hear his "Henriade," which occupied all his study, he was so disturbed by their remarks that he threw the manuscript into the fire; whence it was rescued, however, by the President Hénault, at the expense of a pair of ruffles. Soon afterwards spurious copies of the poem were published, by an Abbé Desfontaines: it was received with rage by the bigots of church and state, and with delight by the admirers of talent. The king, influenced by clamour, declined the dedication; and even a licence to print the poem complete was, to the disgrace of the government, refused. In our day, a copy of it was enclosed in the horse of the statue of Henry IV., put up by order of the government of Lewis XVIII.

An incident, characteristic of the old government of France, brought him into fresh

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trouble. One day dining with the Duke of Sully, he contradicted, with some of that disdain which was natural to him, an opinion of the Chevalier de Rohan, a person of very noble birth, and very ignoble conduct. "Who is this young man who talks so loud?" said the chevalier.—"One who has not a great name, but who does honour to that which he bears," replied Voltaire. The chevalier had the meanness to revenge himself, by paying two men to decoy Voltaire into the street and beat him, while this noble person looked on from his carriage. Voltaire learned fencing, and challenged his enemy; but such was the discreet indiscretion of the chevalier, that his family heard of the adventure, and obtained an order from the Duke of Bourbon to send the challenger to the Bastile. Here he remained six months; and on his liberation received an order to quit the kingdom. He immediately repaired to England, whose language he had studied for some time.

When Voltaire arrived in England, he found a people, in the full enjoyment of civil liberty, disputing on the truth of Christianity. Unhappily, the first of these lessons did not

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make so much impression upon him as the second. Whether he thought it impossible to introduce political freedom in France, or whether, as is more probable, his own inclination was in favour of a tolerant, sceptical, indulgent, and vicious government, it is certain that he neglected the practical good, and embraced the speculative evil. Probably the works of Toland, Tindal, and Collins contributed to confirm the opinions which Voltaire, as we have seen, had very early imbibed.* We shall afterwards consider the importance of his determination.

* One of the biographers of Voltaire has an amusing passage on this subject. He informs his readers that it was in the society of Toland, of Chubb, "of Switz, the Rabelais of England, who, notwithstanding his dignities in the church, turned against religion the sharpest weapons of ridicule;" of Collins, of Tindal, of Wolston, of "Bishop Tailor, author of the *Guide des Douleurs;* of Lord Herbert of Cherbury, of Lord Shaftesbury, of Bolingbroke;—in fine, it was in the society, we repeat, of all these men, become his oracles, that Voltaire became thoroughly imbued with sentiments of irreligion." See Life of Voltaire by L. P. de Warey, Capitaine décoré, et membre de plusieurs sociétés savantes et litéraires." The captain might be permitted to make these blunders, but it is well for the learned societies, their associate has not named them. A few

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Voltaire remained in England three years. During this time he published the "Henriade," dedicated to the queen: a large subscription was made, and laid the first foundation of his fortune. When he returned to France, abandoning his revenge, he set himself to augment his means. Some prizes in a lottery, a successful speculation in African wheat, and another in Spanish commerce, greatly augmented his stock: a share in the contract for provisions for the army of Italy, given him by Paris Duverney, was still more lucrative, and brought him 800,000 francs. Some verses, however, on the refusal of Christian burial to Mademoiselle Leconvreur, animated with the indignation which that barbarous usage of the French church is fitted to inspire, sent him into retirement, for fear of a fresh imprisonment. He lived for some time at Rouen, where he pursued his literary enterprises with wonderful activity and talent. There he printed, with the greatest secrecy, his "History

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pages further he complains that the protection of all those illustrious persons could not save Voltaire from a beating by a city bookseller!

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of Charles XII." On his return to Paris (1730), he produced "Brutus," and two years afterwards "Zaire," which bears ample traces of his studies of Shakspeare. It was received with enthusiasm. "Adelaide du Guesclin," not so fortunate, was shipwrecked on a pun: at the question of Vendôme, "*Es-tu content, Coucy?*" some one in the pit cried *Cosi, cosi;* and the audience joined the wit against the author: — such is the hazard of tragedy. After this he got again on forbidden ground: his Philosophical Letters, his "Epître à Uranie," and his "Mort de César" appearing one after the other (the two former without his consent), raised such a clamour, that he had serious thoughts of leaving Paris, and even France, for ever. He was deterred from this notion by Madame du Châtelet; a lady celebrated for her talents. She persuaded him, instead of leaving France, to retire with her to Cirey, an estate on the borders of Champagne, on the side of Lorraine. Of the nature of their connexion there can be no doubt; but certainly no amorous attachment ever had more the air of a literary part-

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nership. Madame du Châtelet was a natural philosopher, and mathematician of no mean degree; she wrote a commentary on Newton, which is much esteemed. Her moral philosophy, no less positive than her geometry, was not of so elevated a nature: her settled opinion was, that we have nothing better to do in the world than to procure ourselves agreeable feelings and sensations. She pitied those who were forced to restrain their appetite; "as for me," she said, "I enjoy the love of good eating with which God has blessed me." Madame du Châtelet entered warmly into the poetical and historical studies of her lover; while Voltaire, on his side, studied geometry, and produced a popular account of the philosophy of Newton, which great mathematicians have regarded with approbation. Although this work treated purely of scientific subjects, D'Aguesseau the chancellor, being a Cartesian, was sufficiently narrow-minded to prevent its publication. After some time spent in science, Voltaire turned again to literature; and the fertility of his imagination was proved by the production of "Alzire," "Zu-

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lime," "Mahomet," and "Mérope." At the same time, he prepared himself with great industry to gain the laurel of history. When "Mahomet" appeared on the stage, so much clamour was excited that Cardinal Fleury advised him to withdraw it. Far different was the fate of "Mérope:" such was the enthusiasm excited by that admirable piece that the author was called for, the first example of such a honour. To add to his triumph, as he was sitting in the box of the Maréchale de Villars, her daughter-in-law was ordered to embrace him by the public; which being performed to their satisfaction, they renewed their applause. In the midst of these literary triumphs, he tried the part of what is called public life: he was sent on a mission to the King of Prussia, with whom he had been in correspondence when Prince Royal. He was not again employed. Desirous, however, of being well with the court, he composed two or three pieces for the marriage of the dauphin; one of which, the "Princess of Navarre," procured for him the appointment of gentleman of the bed-chamber. On the representation of another, "Le Temple

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de la Gloire," he went to the king's box and called out, "Is Trajan satisfied?" The king was shocked with the liberty, other men with the adulation of this address.

A contest with another poet produced new triumphs of genius: "Sémiramis," "Rome sauvée," and "Oreste," were written to show, that, even in his own subjects, he could excel Crébillon, who had been taken up by Madame de Pompadour, with a view to give him a rival. During these labours he was frequently absent from Cirey. His life at that place was far from being so tranquil as the union of philosophy and literature might lead us to expect. The moral philosopher and his mathematical mistress were subject to transports of rage, which were roused by very trifling circumstances. Besides the immortal works we have mentioned, Voltaire wrote at this time the very obscene poem called the "Pucelle d'Orléans:" some stanzas of it were repeated at Paris; and the author, suspecting a Madame de Graffigny, who lived in the house at Cirey, foamed with anger and fury. Other dissensions and miseries troubled this studious retreat. At length, on a visit at Luneville to

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King Stanislaus, Madame du Châtelet fell violently in love with M. de Saint Lambert: the intrigue was discovered by Voltaire; and his mistress, mathematician as she was, died in child-birth at the age of forty-three. After her death her husband opened a ring concealing a portrait, which had been once his own. Voltaire knew that he had replaced the Duke of Richelieu; and he had now the mortification to see that Saint Lambert had replaced him. "Monsieur le Marquis," he said to the unhappy husband, "this is a discovery which does no honour to either of us."

Voltaire returned to Paris; but not long after, was persuaded by the King of Prussia to pay him a visit at Potsdam. He had received an invitation the year before, to which he had replied, saying, that Stanislaus would take his absence ill; but that if his majesty would send him "half a yard of black riband," he should have a reason for going. Presently afterwards he wrote again, urging directly his claim for the Order of Merit. He was now partly excited by some verses of Frederic, in which he had spoken of a young

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poet as rising to console the world for the setting sun of Voltaire. "I must teach the King of Prussia that I am not setting yet," said the sensitive genius. However, his friendship for a philosophical king was as unfortunate in its end as his love for a philosophical mistress. For a time, indeed, the distinctions heaped upon him, a good salary, a comfortable apartment, and gay suppers, seemed to promise a delightful abode. But the two men were not made to live together. Voltaire showed a disposition not a little interested: Frederic was of the same temper. Voltaire obtained first 16,000 livres to pay his journey; then a pension of 4,000 livres for the life of his niece. He had, at Potsdam, an apartment in the king's own palace, where he was allowed two wax candles and a certain quantity of sugar and coffee per day. He complained that these allowances were not regularly brought. "Come, my dear friend," said Frederic, "you can do very well without these little allowances: they give you trouble on subjects unworthy of you; let us speak no more about it: I will order them to be suppressed for the future." The philosopher

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author met stratagem by stratagem: — in the course of the evening he frequently left the apartment of the philosopher king, and always took a candle with him, which he forgot to bring back.* Such are great men when looked at by a valet-de-chambre! Frederic, besides this, gave Voltaire his French verses to correct; and Voltaire, while using the critic's knife without mercy, complained of being obliged "to wash the king's dirty linen!" On the other hand, Voltaire excited the envy and ridiculed the conceit of the literary and scientific staff which Frederic had established about his person. Maupertuis especially, head of the Academy of Sciences, showed strong symptoms of malice towards the new-comer. Voltaire revenged himself by a cutting satire, called the "Diatribe of Doctor Akakia," and printed it surreptitiously by virtue of a privilege obtained for another work. Frederic laughed heartily when he read it; but, for the sake of peace, required Voltaire to give up all the printed copies: Voltaire apparently acquiesced, and the king

* Thiébault.

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burnt them at his own chimney; but, somehow, the work found its way to Holland, and was soon sold all over Germany. Frederic, enraged at the double offence of ridiculing his academy in public, and cheating himself in private, ordered the book to be burnt by the executioner. This was too much: Voltaire resigned his pension and office of chamberlain. The quarrel was made up for a time; but he persisted in his desire to leave the kingdom of the royal sage. Frederic at last consented, on condition that he would return. When he was gone, however, the enemies whom he left behind, persuaded the king that he would make a bad use of a printed copy of the royal poems, which contained a satire of living persons, called the "Palladium;" and an order was sent to obtain them. Voltaire had stayed twenty-three days at Leipzic, and is said to have composed there a libel, called "Vie privée de Frederic II.," which circulated in Germany. It is certain, at least, that Frederic believed him to have been the author, as he alludes to it in his letters. — "I forgive, in favour of your genius, all the troubles at Berlin — all

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the libels of Leipzic, &c."* The king's order reached Voltaire at Frankfort in a very singular way. Freytag, the Prussian envoy, with a Prussian officer and a citizen of Frankfort, burst into his room, and asked for the key of chamberlain, the Order of Merit, and the "Œuvres de Poéshie du roi mon maître." The book had been left at Leipzic with the heavy baggage, to which it properly belonged: however, it was procured; and at the end of some days Voltaire set out to continue his journey. But there arrived at the same time with the book, fresh orders from the king to detain Voltaire. He attempted to escape with his secretary; but they were both arrested at the gate. Voltaire was shut up in the "worst inn's worst room," with three soldiers, armed with bayonets, to guard him; his secretary and his niece in separate rooms. They were kept sixteen days. At length directions came from Berlin for their release; and Voltaire, glad to find himself at length delivered from such generous protection, must have felt that an arbitrary sceptre is wielded with as little tenderness by

* Corr. Apr. 18. 1759.

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a lettered king as by the most ignorant of monarchs. — He never forgot it.

Voltaire now wished to fix his residence in Paris; but he found that his presence there would not be approved by the king of France. He was on his way to Aix en Savoye, when Tronchin, whom he consulted at Geneva, advised him against that place. From this accident it happened that he at length chose his residence on the Lake of Geneva, inhabiting first the Prangen, near Nyon; Monrion, in the territory of Lausanne; then Les Délices, near Geneva; and, at last, Ferney, in the territory of France. Thus, at length, at the age of sixty, he chose an independent and comfortable existence: the only wonder is that he had not done so before; for, after buying, building, giving, and spending large sums, it appeared at his death that he was in the enjoyment of a revenue of between six and seven thousand pounds a year. At Ferney, where he lived for the last twenty years of his life, his conduct was that of a rich and generous landlord. He rebuilt the cottages, which were wretched and ruinous; drained the marshes; gave employment to his labourers,

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or rather vassals; established a theatre, where the best company of Geneva came to see the best plays of Paris; and, in fine, was at once a kind landlord and a hospitable host. He even rebuilt the church; but the abrupt manner in which he threw down the old building was offensive to the bishop. "What does monseigneur complain of?" said Voltaire: "his God and mine was lodged in a barn; I have given him a handsome temple: the Christ was of rotten wood; I have had him gilt like an emperor!" This light manner of talking, and the arrogant inscription, "Deo erexit Voltaire," was offensive to many besides the clergy. When the building was finished, he preached a sermon from it on theft.

Besides an extraordinary activity as a landlord, and sumptuously treating his guests, Voltaire had three occupations at Ferney:— the first and best was making himself useful to his fellow-creatures. A young girl descended from Corneille was recommended to his generosity: he was grateful for the suggestion, saying, "it was pointing out to an old soldier a way of being useful to his general." After giving this poor girl a useful and Chris-

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tian education, entirely at his expense, he composed a commentary on Corneille (one of the best works of criticism ever written), the produce of which was given to her as a fortune, and procured her the hand of a neighbouring gentleman. A still more important labour awaited him. — A young man of the name of Calas, of a Calvinist family, had been found hanged at Toulouse: a dreadful report was spread, that the father of the young man, knowing of his wish and intention to change his religion, had been the murderer of his child. Few circumstances were produced to corroborate the belief of so improbable a crime; but fanaticism and bigotry supplied the defect of evidence, and the old man was executed on the wheel. The widow and family of Calas had recourse to the pen of Voltaire; and it soon appeared that the appeal was not in vain. He received the family, bestowed his money to employ lawyers, his credit to procure friends, and his talent in exciting the sympathy of the public. In twenty memorials, one more eloquent than another, he pleaded the cause of this unhappy family: success crowned his efforts; the king's council at Paris reversed the decree of the parliament

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of Toulouse, and the property confiscated was restored to the family of the unhappy old man. Sirven, another Protestant, was likewise condemned to death, because his daughter, who had been confined in a convent, had thrown herself into a well; but, more fortunate than Calas, he escaped the execution of his sentence by flight; and, after eighteen years of perseverance, Voltaire so fully succeeded in convincing the world of his innocence, that he again presented himself before the tribunal which had condemned Calas, and was acquitted. It must be owned that these judgments, while they raise our admiration for Voltaire, give a most unfavourable impression of what were at that time called courts of justice. A gentleman of Toulouse, trying to exculpate his countrymen, quoted to the Duke of Ayen the French proverb, "The best horse sometimes stumbles."—"Yes," replied the Duke; "but a whole stable!" In fact, without vigilant control and publicity, judges, like other men, listen to interest and passion rather than truth. For twenty years the redress of judicial wrongs seemed to hang entirely on the pen of Voltaire. He protested

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with great feeling and eloquence against the sentence upon Count Lally, who had been condemned by the parliament of Paris, obviously against reason and justice, to lose his head. The reversal of the sentence he could not obtain; but he paved the way for the pathetic and glorious appeals of the son of the accused, which, in due time, were crowned with complete success. On various other occasions, Voltaire obtained the restoration of liberty and property to those who had been wrongfully deprived of them. One cruel judgment interested him especially, as he was made to bear a part of the blame. Two young officers, one of them the Chevalier de Barré, only twenty years of age, were accused of blasphemy and obscenity in their orgies; and moreover, with having destroyed a cross at Abbeville. Instead of a corrective punishment, these young men were condemned to death; and the Chevalier de Barré actually suffered. It was said that one of Voltaire's works was found among the books of the young man, and had served to corrupt him. When, therefore, he exclaimed against the barbarity of the sentence, much of the fault, it was justly re-

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torted, attached to him who had misled young imaginations with topics so dangerous. He fought in better armour when he pleaded the cause of the serfs of Mount Jura; and although his efforts failed at the court of Lewis the XV., to them was in great part owing the edict of his grandson, which abolished slavery in the royal domains.

The literary occupations of Voltaire were no less various. He finished the "Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations," wrote the "Philosophy of History," the "History of Peter the Great," and the "History of the Parliament of Paris." He finished the "Orphelin de la Chine;" and, at the age of 70, when the heart is usually cold, and the head feeble, produced "Tancrède," one of the most spirited and pathetic of all his tragedies. After this, he wrote eight or nine more tragedies, and four comedies, but without any striking success. At this time, likewise, he wrote most of his tales in prose, almost all those in verse, and numerous poetical works, in the form of epistles and satires. This fertility was a natural wonder; but Voltaire, delighted with the astonishment he raised, sacrificed the ex-

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cellence of his works, and the repose of his life, for the indulgence of this vanity. Banished from Paris, he shut himself up at Ferney, and was often for a long time together invisible to his friends and his guests, that he might occupy every day, and every hour, the attention of the capital, and be present in mind to those whom he could not visit in body.

The last occupation of this extraordinary man, and that which does him the least honour, was the bitter and incessant war which he made against the Christian religion. Sometimes it was a large book, sometimes a penny pamphlet; now a treatise on divinity, now a tale or a song; but, in one shape or other, hostilities never ceased. Let it be remarked, that it was after sixty years of age that his infidelity became most notorious, his ribaldry most insolent, his obscenity most offensive: yet, with an audacity that amounted to shamelessness were united a timidity and caution which shewed his love of ease and enjoyment. His attacks upon Christianity came out anonymously; and when they were attributed to him, he would deny them, even with an oath. Hearing that the Bishop of Annecy had for-

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bidden any priest of his diocese to administer the communion to him, he feigned sickness, persuaded his surgeon he had a fever, terrified a capuchin into giving him the sacrament as a dying man; and had the fact recorded legally by the notary of the place.

His usual habit at this time was to stay in bed till twelve o'clock: till two, he wrote or received company; from two till four he was out in his carriage with his secretary; on his return he took coffee or chocolate, and worked till eight or nine, when, if well, he appeared at supper. He went to bed between eleven and twelve, and never slept more than five hours. When he wished to write down his thoughts, he rang for his secretary, whose room was below his.

At length, Lewis XVI. having been four years upon the throne, Madame Dénis persuaded him to go to Paris. He set out on the 6th of February, 1778, arrived on the 10th, and took up his abode with the Marquis of Villette, on what is now called the Quai Voltaire. His reception by all classes, except the clergy, was enthusiastic — by the courtiers, the academy, the ministry, the people; at

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the theatre, in the streets, at his own home, he was deafened with applause, and attended with homage. The somewhat singular cries, Vive la Henriade! Vive Mahomet! Vive la Pucelle! saluted him when he got into his carriage.

His delight was extreme; his activity incessant. "They will make me die of pleasure," he exclaimed: at the same time he endeavoured to show that he could write as fast and as well at Paris as at Ferney. At length his constitution yielded to the prodigious excitement to which he exposed it. All day he was occupied in receiving the homage of men of letters, giving directions to actors, exhibiting his talents of conversation to the wonder of ladies of fashion, or replying to priests who charged themselves with the care of his conversion. At night, he fatigued his exhausted body by writing for the first letter of the Dictionary; and, to prevent sleep, abused the excitement of coffee. All these strains upon his frame left him a prey to a disease with which he had long been afflicted. The moment he was known to be in danger, the pious and the impious gave

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themselves vast trouble to save his soul, partly for his good, more for their own vanity. He himself, with a feeling neither religious nor irreligious, but natural, exclaimed, "I will not have my body thrown to the shambles." What happened no one can exactly say. According to the most probable account, when summoned by the curé of St. Sulpice to declare his belief in the divinity of Christ, he replied, "In the name of God, speak to me no more of that man; let me die in peace." The curé, turning to the Abbé Gautier, said prudently, "You see he has lost his head!" He was, therefore, allowed to die as he desired. He expired on the 30th of May; and the body having been embalmed, was carried to the abbey of Scellières, and had just been buried, when the prior received an order from his bishop not to allow the burial.

The character of Voltaire is not one difficult to penetrate. He had all the warmth of genius in favour of the oppressed, and a boldness in declaring his opinions, which is nearly akin to the love of truth. But, in fact, he was fond, not of truth, but of his own truth:

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vanity and personal feelings mixed with all his doctrines, and coloured his brightest productions. A man of more extensive capacity, more quick in detecting error, more vigorous and lively in exposing it; a man combining, to so great a degree, the fancy and feeling of a poet, with the analytical powers of a wit, and the close reasoning of a logician, perhaps never existed. But, with this high rank of understanding, he had a soul which, in littleness of jealousy, in meanness of flattery, in calculations of interest, in arrogance and irritability of temper, was not an inch above the tribe of vulgar authors.

Voltaire must always rank one of the greatest among great writers. No man ever succeeded in so many different kinds of composition. As a tragic poet, he is eloquent, interesting, pathetic; as a writer of familiar pieces, his facility and grace are unequalled and inimitable. His prose works are remarkable for the clearness, ease, and apparent simplicity of the style: at first, you are struck with the good sense and want of affectation; presently you perceive the singular happiness of expression, and the quick strokes of satire, which distinguish his works. Perhaps there

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is no author who has so much wit, Swift not excepted; and certainly none, except Cervantes, who, having so much, has done so little to obscure it by a false taste. A lady once telling him that M. Boisgelin was to be elected a member of the Academy, he said, "Well, he is a man who can turn a phrase." On which the lady complimented him on the excellence of his. "My phrases!" exclaimed Voltaire: "I would have you to know, Madam, I never turned a phrase in all my life; and I am proud of it." Such, in fact, is the cause that there are more readable volumes of Voltaire than of any other author, and that his bulky works are bought with such eagerness by the public. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that many of these volumes are stained by obscenity, vulgar abuse, and gross impiety. We are only speaking now of his merits as a writer; but, even as a writer, these faults are very grave deductions from his merits.

To consider him somewhat more in detail, his rank as a tragic poet must be always very close to Corneille and Racine. Such was his prodigious fertility, that in this walk alone he

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produced no less than twenty-seven tragedies; a number which would suffice to occupy the life and furnish the reputation, not of an ordinary, but of an extraordinary man. Several of these, especially "Zaïre," "Alzire," "Sémiramis," and, perhaps above all, "Mérope," are of the highest degree of merit. It is remarkable, however, that Voltaire, who never scrupled to combat an established opinion in religion or ethics, should have been so timid an innovator upon the established constitution of the stage. His acquaintance with foreign literature, especially with Shakspeare, induced him to hazard some novelties; but he never dared to violate the sacred unities, or to introduce human character in the place of abstract passion. An Italian author has shown, with great felicity, how much "Zaïre," which was evidently borrowed from "Othello," has suffered by this superstitious scruple.* It may be questioned, whether, thus limited, the innovations of Voltaire in tragedy were not rather detrimental than advantageous to the perfection of his works. The style of Racine,—simple, noble, touching,—is admirably suited to the restricted

* Manzoni.

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plan by which he allowed himself to be bound; but the passionate declamation of Voltaire, — more fiery, more rapid, and more discursive, — makes the chains rattle which the author has not the courage to shake off.

The "Henriade" does not bring Voltaire so near to Virgil and Tasso as "Zaïre" does to Corneille and Racine. It is a splendid failure; but it *is* a failure. Whatever may be the faults of execution, however, perhaps the design did not admit of success. Henry IV. belongs to history, and not to fiction: had Patroclus written the memoirs of Achilles, as Sully has written those of Henry, Homer could never have produced the Iliad. The name of Sully recalls to mind a very petty vengeance of Voltaire. In the original design Sully bore a very conspicuous part; but the Duke of Sully having deserted the author in the affair of the Chevalier de Rohan, the name of Mornay was substituted for that of Sully: and it may be observed, that whenever, in his other works, a natural occasion for praising Sully occurs, the name of Mornay comes up in its place.

If Voltaire's epic hardly answers its de-

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scription, his light poetry, on the other hand, has all the ease, sprightliness, and flow, which constitute perfection in this branch of the art. It is full of grace, wit, and talent; the genius of a poet, and the taste of a gentleman.

Voltaire, as an historian, is more subject to criticism. His works of this kind are written, indeed, in an admirable style; clear and simple; epigrammatic only from quickness of observation; and combining, with accuracy and brevity, facts of the highest importance, many of which would have escaped the most tedious compiler. Indeed, there was not, perhaps, before his time, a philosophical history of modern times. But when this is said, it must be added, he has many defects. He does not carry us on with the spirit of his narrative, like Livy; nor impress us by the depth of his observation, like Tacitus. His scepticism with respect to all actions of extraordinary virtue or atrocity, and his uncontrollable disposition to make light of every thing, destroy the interest of his narrative. His remarks are rather those of a quick and scornful, than of a profound and feeling observer of human life. He has no cause to

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espouse: he is neither Catholic nor Protestant; neither for slavery nor for liberty; a degree of neutrality which, however well it may sound, is fatal to deep interest. The old historians were contented with giving their view of the facts, and of the merits of the question in which they felt an interest; and left it to the world to weigh their motives and their accuracy. Voltaire attempts to act the part of a judge, and to sum up the results of the evidence he produces, without any leaning to either side. But if the author is impartial, the reader is generally indifferent. Yet, after all, the work is not so impartial as it seems. The promotion of the cause of infidelity is always kept in view. Montesquieu is said to have made a remark, to be found in an unedited manuscript: — "Voltaire will never write a good history. He is like the monks, who do not write for their subject, but for the glory of their order: Voltaire writes for his convent."

Such may be said to be the general character of his historical works. In each, however, there is a certain bias. In the "History of Charles XII." he shows an interest in the

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feats of his hero; in his "Age of Lewis XIV." he exaggerates the merits, and disguises the defects, of that monarch; and in his general history of Europe ("Essai sur les Mœurs," &c.) he shows a never-failing anxiety to plead the cause of scepticism against Christianity. Of these partialities, that in favour of Charles XII. gives a dramatic interest to the work; which is, perhaps, his best in this style. In the "Siècle de Louis XIV." he has given a brilliant and highly-coloured picture of that pompous reign. Nor does he fail, here and there, to strike, with his keen and polished weapon, at the ambition and vanity of the monarch: but, on many important points, he betrays the cause of truth; and, writing for the applause of his own time, shuts his eyes to the inevitable judgment of posterity. What, but wilful partiality, could induce him to say that the expulsion of the Protestants was only the children of the family driving out strangers? What, but a spirit of flattery to his court and country, could induce him to see in the English Revolution of 1688 nothing but the criminal enterprise of a son against his father-in-law? What, but a studied concealment of

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the faults of Lewis XIV., could induce him to say, that that monarch did not allow his mistresses to have any influence over him?

The "Essai sur les Mœurs," a history of modern Europe, which Dr. Robertson has pronounced to be accurate, and which every reader must allow to be agreeable, is replete with sarcasms against Christianity, and exaggerated descriptions of the virtues of China. There is, besides, a species of inaccuracy in the work, of which, perhaps, Dr. Robertson was not so good a judge, and in which he has himself not unfrequently fallen, with nearly all the historians of the school of Voltaire. This consists neither in an ignorance nor a wilful perversion of facts, but in a habit of deciding upon these facts as if they were insulated, without reference to the spirit of the time in which they happened. Hence, although the statement may be literally true, it is often substantially false; rash and superficial judgments are formed; the men of the fourteenth century are judged by the standard of the eighteenth; and the interest, together with the spirit of individual history, is lost. In short, human character, in a history of this

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kind, becomes what it is in a French tragedy — one general colour is thrown over it, and the distinctive tints are entirely lost.

Of his numerous other writings there is no room here to speak as they deserve. Yet it is impossible to omit the mention of his tales: nowhere does the originality of Voltaire appear more striking than in these productions. The sparkling flashes of wit, the broad strokes of humour, the lively satire, and, very frequently, the just reflection, which appear in some of these tales, make it matter of deep regret that they are contaminated by a spirit of impiety, and a grossness of indecency, which make them unfit for general perusal.

Of his familiar letters it may be said, that they are good letters, because they are easy and natural; but it is evident he did not, as some others have done, pour out his best thoughts in this kind of composition.

Having thus sketched the leading features of Voltaire, both as a man and an author, the painful task remains of considering him as the persevering, able, and, for a time, the successful enemy of Christianity. To quote his own words, — "I am tired," he declared,

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"of hearing it said, that twelve men were sufficient to establish the Christian religion: I am anxious to show them that it requires but one to destroy it!" Fourteen years after his death the national representatives passed a vote acknowledging the existence of the Supreme Being.

Let us, however, view the enterprise of Voltaire solely as the work of a man who professed a love for mankind, and a belief in the power of God. Let it be granted that he could not control his belief; that he had carefully examined the foundation of his opinions, and was, from pure conviction, a Deist: still we must consider him responsible for the overt acts of his conspiracy against the religion of Europe.

The morality of a nation is intimately connected with its religion. Take away religion, and, in the minds of most men, you take away the obligation to restrain their passions—to speak truth—to respect the rights and feelings of others. It is not enough to say that you leave the obligations of natural morality and the penalties of the law: these have never

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yet been found sufficient for the guidance and the check of human passions. When the Romans became wise enough to despise the oracles of their forefathers, and augurs almost laughed in each other's faces, they ceased to respect an oath; and the sanctity of their domestic life was exchanged for the most abominable prostitution. In those days of sensual license Christianity arose, to impose a new moral check upon mankind. When Voltaire appeared, this religion was not, indeed, the creed of the regent and his mistresses, or of the Cardinal Dubois and his followers; but it was the faith of all that was really worthy, high-minded, and respectable in France. It was taught in her colleges, preached in her churches, sung in her camps, to men whose notions of honesty, piety, self-sacrifice, were all blended with Christianity. When, therefore, its foundations were sapped in their minds, the God to whose ear they addressed their prayers, before whose eye they feared to commit iniquity, was effaced. There remained in his room only a vague generality, totally powerless in checking any bad passion or restraining any unlawful desire.

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Let us add to this, that all the great writers, all the sublime preachers, of France inculcated morality in the name of Christ. It could hardly be denied, that the doctrines of Fénélon, of Bourdaloue, of Massillon, were the most elevated, and, at the same time, the most consoling, that could be imparted to mankind. But they all spoke in the name of Christ. Take away that name, their doctrines remained without a sanction; and, far from being in themselves an authority, their credulity made them almost objects of ridicule. Thus, the highest and best literature of France, — that which was devoted to the improvement of man, to raise his views, to guide his conduct, — became at once useless and obsolete.

These were considerations which might have made Voltaire pause in the anti-crusade he undertook. But let us go a little further, and ask, — Were the doctrines taught in the Old and New Testament so repugnant, even to natural religion, that they required the reprobation of a benevolent Deist? It was easy, no doubt, for a man of less wit than Voltaire to point out many dark passages in the history of

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the Jews, and to ridicule expressions which, sprung in the fervid East, are not easily transplanted into our cold and critical languages. But, in general, what does the Old Testament teach? That there is but one God, the Lord of heaven and earth; that wickedness incurs his displeasure; and uprightness is rewarded by his favour. Had a great writer wished to express his thorough sense of the duty of loving mankind, what better terms could he have employed than the language of Job?—"If I did despise the cause of my man-servant or of my maid-servant, when they contended with me; what then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not He that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb? If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; .... then let mine arm fall from my shoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone."*

* Job, chap. xxxi.

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Or if he wished to show that God alone was to be worshipped, free from all worldliness and idolatry, does not the same book tell him: —"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge: for I should have denied the God that is above."*

It is in the same spirit that God is described, in one of the apocryphal books, as a refuge against the prevailing power of force.—"For thy power standeth not in multitude, nor thy might in strong men; for thou art a God of the afflicted, a helper of the oppressed, an upholder of the weak, a protector of the forlorn, a Saviour of them that are without help." But let us turn to Christianity. What can religion do better than sustain the poor and afflicted against the oppression of the powerful; place a restraint on passions mischievous to society; and proclaim a future life as a

* Job, chap. xxxi.

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reward for unhappy virtue, and a retribution to successful crime? All these things, however, are performed by the Christian religion; and it would be vain for the highest philosophy to attempt to teach with the same authority, or to obtain the same obedience. That government of the higher parts of our nature over the lower, which the stoics taught on a false foundation, which the early Romans practised for a worldly end, Christianity inculcated with the motive of producing good will among mankind, and without any sacrifice either of real freedom or rational pleasure.

There is another view which may be taken of the enterprise of Voltaire. Christ, whatever might be his doctrines, had given the example of a pure life; and had laid down that life for mankind. But what was the example afforded by the leader of a new sect, and the subverter of an ancient faith? Since he chose to lead, he was bound to give an example which might be fit to follow; Epicurus himself was a man of a pure and virtuous life. But not only was the moral conduct of Voltaire censurable, and his conversation licentious; his writings were replete with

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gross indecency and insulting outrage to all that is modest and uncorrupted. Nor was it merely by the indulgence of sensuality that he was unfit to serve as a model: he was subject to anger, and envy, and hatred, and was full of malice, falsehood, and hypocrisy. Sometimes he would be seen tearing with his teeth a stupid pamphlet, written to depreciate his genius: at another we find him writing anonymous libels against men, whom in public he flattered. That he had a general desire for the improvement of mankind, cannot, indeed, be doubted: but what was he ready to sacrifice, or even risk, for their welfare? By the course he took he gained more power, riches, and fame than he could possibly have acquired in any other way. As for any serious danger to his life or liberty, there was none; but when the smallest danger appeared, even of his having to encounter the pointless weapons of the church, what was his conduct? He fled from the danger, made the most hypocritical submissions, feigned what he did not believe, and professed himself a member of that religion which he daily insulted. In writing to Mon-

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sieur and Madame d'Argental, he says,—"My angels, if I had a hundred thousand men, I know what I would do; but, as I have them not, I shall take the sacrament at Easter, and you may call me hypocrite as long as you please."*

"Let us keep our advantage: let the blows which stun them be struck by invisible hands: let them sink under the public contempt!"†

"No, my dear marquis, no! the modern Socrates will not drink hemlock: . . . our philosophers of the present age are more skilful; they have not the foolish vanity to put their names to their works: the hands which strike fanaticism from one end of Europe to the other are invisible." In the same sense he wrote that, if he lived at Abbeville, he would take the sacrament every fortnight. Be it so; the persecution of opinions might justify his prudence; but, we may ask, is such a man to be followed and admired, like him who is ready to "lay down his life for his friend,"

* Corréspondance, Feb. 16. 1761.
† Id. Helvetius, Sept. 15. 1768.

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or to seal the sincerity of his conduct by the ready sacrifice of his blood?

Before we leave Voltaire, one singular part of his character deserves our attention and our wonder. Employed as he was in battering the very citadel of Christianity, he did not wish to change the existing state of things. A living author, of great talent, has compared him to Babouc, a character of his own tales; who, after seeing all the vices of Persepolis, was yet loth to destroy it. The comparison is happy and just: Voltaire, himself a child of the vicious society he described, whose recollections of youth and pleasure all referred to the convivial license of the regency, could not bring himself to wish the destruction of Persepolis. Nothing further from his views than a popular revolution; and, while he led public opinion, he never would have attempted even any legal control upon the vicious despotism by which France was oppressed.

We have direct testimony to this point in a letter he wrote to a M. Dupont on the subject of the taxes, of which the following is an extract:—"I see many abuses; I believe them inseparable from human nature, and, above

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all, from the nature of the French nation: but, upon the whole, I believe the good outweighs the cost. I think the taxes very just, though very heavy; because, in every country, except that of illusions, a state can only pay its debts with money." *

Strange inconsistency! that a man of so much genius should wish to preserve the trunk and leaves of the tree, when he was aiming at the root! That he should intend to maintain the superstructure, while he was sapping the foundations! That he should think it possible, by means of the press, to establish incredulity among the rulers for the benefit of the governed; and yet to preserve implicit obedience among the governed for the benefit of their rulers!

The eighteenth century, much as it has been the object of abuse, required something better than this. It was an age that was still, indeed, but not stagnant: the current was rapid, although the surface was not ruffled. The very absence of events to stimulate the heart turned all ardent spirits and all in-

* Published in Grimm, tom. iv. p. 7.

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genious talent into the fields of speculation. The middle ages had their crusades. The revival of letters had scarcely roused the curiosity of Europe, when the Reformation excited the most bloody rage, and divided the subject from his sovereign, the son from his father. When this fury had somewhat cooled, the pretensions of Lewis XIV., on the one hand, and the defence of what were called the liberties of Europe, on the other, afforded a field for the swords of warriors, and a subject for the pens of authors. But the eighteenth century had no predominant interest to contend for: whether Maria Theresa should have a province the less, or George II. a colony the more, was not a question to excite enthusiasm or absorb attention. Yet, in this age, no less than in the preceding, there were young men of hot blood, and mature ones of lofty intellect. Voltaire and Montesquieu quickened their faculties, improved the vigour of their understandings; but, for the reasons we have given, did not satisfy the prevailing feelings. The writings of these two great authors, although the one was solid as well as brilliant, and the other sparkling as well as profound, were not

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enough to satisfy the appetite of the age for knowledge and sensation. The mind of France, roused into curiosity by the genius of Voltaire, was on the alert to discover new truths in philosophy, and to imbibe new feelings in ethics. The literature of the age of Lewis XIV., and the riotous debauchery of the regency, had ceased to excite any emotion of pleasure. Novelty was required, and a novelty that might occupy the soul, and prevent the lethargy of Europe. Voltaire was little calculated to do this. He wrote in a style of ridicule; and it seemed to be his object to undervalue all human pursuits. His tone was well adapted to prevent the bigot from pursuing his theological hatred, but not to rouse the benevolent man to execute his projects of virtue. Montesquieu was also unfitted to be the head of a sect. His observations were keen and biting, but apparently paradoxical; and, of all things, paradox is the least likely to excite enthusiasm. His aim was rather to induce his readers to study deeply, and observe the manners and institutions of other nations, than to set up any model of his own. He left on the mind an impression of his

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justice, and a general sense of his liberality, but no passionate attachment to his dogma. He saw this himself so clearly, that he has said, — "I shall be more admired than read."

In this state of the public mind of France, there appeared a man endowed with all the gifts calculated to inspire emotion, — a romantic sensibility, a wonderful eloquence, a proud feeling of the dignity of human nature. This was Rousseau, the citizen of a small republic, bred up in the simple manners of the middle class, with his head full of visions of ideal perfection, and his heart teeming with bitter scorn of the epicurean vices and artificial distinctions of the French court. Such was the chief destined to be the leader of the people of France out of the "house of bondage," but not to the "land of promise." Forty years of the desert were destined to be their lot. Let us in the mean while consider the character and writings of this memorable man.

Rousseau has left behind him, under the name of "Confessions," the most extraordinary biography that man ever wrote; not that the events he recounts are, in themselves, of a nature either to excite surprise or deserve

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admiration. He informs us that he was the son of a tradesman of Geneva; that when young he left his father's house; that he entered into the service of a lady at Turin; that being tempted by the sight of a riband, he stole it; and when enquiry was made, in the terror of being discovered, accused a housemaid, one of his fellow-servants, of the crime he had himself committed*: that being received as a gardener into the house of a Madame de Warens, near Chambéry, he succeeded to the place of head-servant, and with the place was admitted to the bed of his mistress, who made it a rule to live in this manner with her head-servant: that having formed an intimate acquaintance with a music-master, who was very kind to him, they went together on a journey to Lyons, where the music-master being seized with a fit in the streets, he ran away and left Lyons, without seeing or hearing more of him: that he once had a conversation with two young ladies who were riding, whom he never saw again: that he went to visit a courtezan at Venice, and left her in disgust:

* Tradition says, that the article stolen was not a riband, but a jewel of value, which is certainly more probable.

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that, finally, he engaged as his mistress and housekeeper a low-bred vulgar girl, by whom he had five children; but that being poor, and much engaged in writing a work on education, he sent them all to the foundling hospital. Such are the chief events he recounts; and it cannot be denied that they might all have happened to the most ordinary and least respectable watch-maker's son in the town of Geneva: yet, strange to say, the book in which they are related is one of the most eloquent and most sentimental that ever was written. Much is told, no doubt, that it is improper to tell, and still more improper to publish; the author seems to glory in declaring that which would cover any other man with shame; and yet it is impossible not to feel an interest in his fate, and to be affected by the extraordinary power he possesses of describing feelings the most romantic with a pencil true to nature. Whence this singular effect?

There can scarcely be a doubt, in the mind of any one who has read his works and his letters, that Rousseau was a man of a heart which, virtuous by nature, was shocked at

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profligacy, revolted at injustice, and scorned the slavery of dependence. But his sensitiveness was such, that he could not bear to live in the world; and with a taste that was both natural and laudable, his wish was to find some place of retirement, where he might see very few persons, and, indulging in his love of nature and of man, pursue the study of plants, and form projects for the benefit of his species, undisturbed by envy, jealousy, or suspicion. But he was not indulged in this wish. From his earliest years he was obliged to seek his bread by industry: after he became famous, his celebrity perpetually haunted him; and a low-minded woman exercised an empire over him which was fatal to his peace. In this situation, his character was totally different from that which his naturally kind feeling and innate love of virtue might have led one to imagine. He passed his life in a perpetual struggle: receiving benefits, hating his benefactors; scorning dependence, and almost always dependent; warm in friendship, yet quarrelling with his friends; burning with love, but never beloved, even by his vulgar mistress. A little more insight into the his-

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tory of Rousseau may explain these strange contradictions.

It is impossible to speak more in detail of the "Confessions," without transforming that extraordinary work into a dry or disgusting narrative. But there are some parts of the subsequent life of Rousseau which are worthy of a notice he has not bestowed on them. Let us pass to the period at which he was obliged to leave France, on account of an order for his arrest issued by the Parliament of Paris, upon the publication of "Émile." He had sent this work to be printed in Holland: but the Prince of Conti was his friend; Marshal Luxembourg had promised his protection; and Malesherbes, the general superintendent of the censorship of books, after seeing the proof-sheets, caused another edition to be printed at Paris. The clergy, however, being informed of what was coming, took so violent a part against the author that his protectors were obliged to forfeit their word; and all that could be effected by the Prince of Conti and Marshal Luxembourg was, to favour his flight to Switzerland. He had no sooner arrived there than he was informed that the

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council of Geneva, without seeing the work, but merely upon receiving a copy of the speech of the French attorney-general, had condemned Émile, and that the senate of Berne had passed a decree prohibiting his entrance upon their territory. These circumstances, it must be owned, were enough to fire with indignation a susceptible and jealous mind. He received, however, the most liberal offers of protection from the King of Prussia, which, after expressing his gratitude, he rejected.

We have an account of him at this period from M. d'Escherny, who lived much in his society, and who writes with a detail, which, though sometimes tiresome, stamps a mark of truth upon his narrative.

"I may be permitted to say a word of the excellent dinners of which I have partaken at the house of Jean Jacques, dining with him alone. His style of cookery was simple; juicy vegetables, and mutton of the valley, admirably roasted, formed his dinner. The conversation was lively and animated; it turned on all sorts of subjects. The air of the mountains is sharp; and we discussed

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each dish with a regularity and science worthy to be inscribed at the Rocher de Cancale. Mademoiselle le Vasseur appeared from time to time. Rousseau amused himself at her expense and mine; but he would not allow her to sit at table with us: he was at his ease, and very gay. After dinner he took up his spinet, and accompanied me in some Italian airs, or sung himself. On fine moonlight nights he amused himself with singing duos on the banks of the Reuse: we had always a good number of listeners, especially the young girls of the village, who did not fail to come and hear us." He then relates that Rousseau wishing to take a house in a milder situation, it was agreed between him and M. du Peyrou, that he should conduct Rousseau to a house of the latter, on the pretence that it was to be let. "We arrived about two o'clock at Cressier: I made him observe the conveniences of the house; and it seemed to please him. We came into the dining-room, and he seemed to look at every thing with an air of satisfaction, when his eye was caught by a silver cup and plate on the sideboard: his countenance instantly darkened. 'What is that silver plate

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doing here? to whom does it belong?'—'I don't know.'—'What! in a house to let, in an empty house, pieces of plate scattered about and abandoned?' To these questions M. d'Escherny was unable to give a satisfactory answer, till, upon a concerted signal, the host came in, and, confessing the trick, begged his pardon. But Rousseau, without answering him, turned to M. d'Escherny and said, 'Sir, I do not like to be deceived, even for my own good.' We sat down to dinner: the conversation languished; Rousseau was thoughtful, and spoke only in monosyllables. There was no further question either of letting or lending the house; I remained in the evening alone with Rousseau, who was still gloomy and out of humour; but I can attest that, for fifteen years, during which I was always, more or less, intimate with him, it is the only reproach of the kind I can make." * It must be owned that there is something very provoking in being always treated as a child; and, if we could examine the hearts of those who thus acted with Rousseau, it is probable we

* Hist. de J. J. Rousseau, p. 83.

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should find more of the vanity of superior sense, than of the truth of unaffected kindness in their motives.

Rousseau afterwards consented, however, to live in a house of M. du Peyrou, at Neufchâtel. Accompanied by M. du Peyrou, M. de Bari, and M. d'Escherny, he made many and long excursions on the mountains in the summer, for the pleasure of studying botany, and enjoying the air and the prospects of that magnificent country. One of these excursions, particularly commemorated, was to the Bec de Chasseron: this is a kind of jetty, or mole, thrown out against the open sky; below are abysses, of which the eye can scarcely reach the bottom; on the right and left the descent is precipitous. It was in such scenes as these that Rousseau felt his mind satisfied, and his heart at ease; and this, without any of that affected transport which the lovers of sublime nature are apt to assume. "We dined between five and six; it was our only meal, and we remained nearly two hours at table. Before and after dinner, as one cannot always talk, we amused ourselves with different children's games: the one which we

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repeated the most frequently (who would believe it?) was the royal game of goose. Our studies were like our games: we used to read the loves of Pierre Lelong and Blanche Bazu; Rousseau was fond of this little novel, which, by its tender and devout pathos, seems to carry one back to the fourteenth century. Sometimes the conversation turned upon the philosophers and authors of Paris: he did justice to them all, even to Voltaire, whose name he never pronounced but with respect. Although he had long before quarrelled with Diderot, he spoke of him with the highest praise; what he above all admired was the depth of his views, his clearness in treating the most abstract subjects, and the gift of employing the *proper word.* Diderot had begged me to make his peace with Rousseau: I spoke, I wrote, I prayed, I pressed; — Rousseau was inexorable." *

It was very unfortunate that Rousseau could not continue this kind of life; circumstances, related in the "Confessions" occurred to disturb him. In the Prussian state, where the sove-

* Hist. de Rousseau, p. 95. In this extract I have a good deal abridged the original.

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reign was for him, the people were against him; and at length a mob threw stones into his house. Alarmed and agitated, he flew to the island of St. Pierre, in the lake of Bienne. Hence he was driven, after a six weeks' residence, by the authorities of Berne, who sent him a dry, harsh order to depart. He set off for Strasburg, hesitating for the choice of his place of refuge between Berlin and London. At length, the latter place was preferred.

We come now to the journey of Rousseau, with Hume, to England. This plan appears to have been formed by Lord Mareschal and the Countess of Boufflers. They thought, no doubt, that the calm and kind disposition of Hume, together with a removal from the authority of censors, senates, and councils, would at length afford to Rousseau the tranquillity of which he was so much in need. These hopes, alas! were destined to be cruelly disappointed. It appears, from every thing that remains of the correspondence, and even from a confession of Rousseau himself, that he was not at this time of sound mind. Indeed, his narrative proves insanity. He relates, that, so early as Roye, the first sleeping place

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from Paris, he heard Mr. Hume cry out in his sleep, "Je te tiens, Jean Jacques Rousseau."* That a mild, good-natured, sensible Scotch philosopher should have uttered an exclamation in the French language, in his sleep, to express his joy that he had got possession of an irritable, poor, unhappy Genevese author, is a supposition that madness only could make. Yet, after this, the fit seems to have subsided. Rousseau was received with great distinction in London; every one was curious to see him, and anxious to oblige him: the king ordered him a pension of 100*l.* a year. He was settled, by the care of Hume, in a country house of Mr. Davenport, in Derbyshire, called Wootton: he there pursued his botanical pursuits, and wrote to his correspondents, that, although he regretted the sun, and his friends, he was well in his retreat. Yet still, from time to time, the most irritating suspicions came across him; and the retirement in which he lived, without society, without books, without any occupation but brooding over his past life, served to nourish the me-

* Letter to M. de Malesherbes, Corr.

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lancholy aberrations of his mind. He had been very angry with Hume for lending himself to a deception of Mr. Davenport, to save him part of the cost of his journey from London; but, after some violent reproaches, he threw himself into Mr. Hume's arms, and wept, conscious of his injustice. But when he was alone his suspicions returned; and, giving himself up to the persuasion that he was betrayed, he wrote, after a long silence, a letter to Mr. Hume, in which he told him,— "You brought me to England, apparently to procure me a retreat; but, in fact, to dishonour me. You apply yourself to this noble work with a zeal worthy of your heart, and an art worthy of your talents." This accusation, heightened by phrases of reproach and contumely, roused the extreme indignation of Hume, who vehemently asked for an explanation. It was given in a long wordy letter, containing all the reveries of Rousseau. It was not difficult for Hume to reply; but it was impossible for him to root out the fixed ideas of his unhappy friend. In this situation, what did he do? Alarmed at the notion that Rousseau was composing his memoirs, he

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wrote to his friends at Paris most connected with literary society, and drew up a laboured narrative of the whole transaction; which, being sent to D'Alembert, was translated by Suard, and, with a preface by D'Alembert himself, given to the world. This conduct was certainly somewhat hasty and inconsistent. Hume had treated Rousseau as a child or a madman: he had invented many little stratagems to make him comfortable without his knowledge of the means; he had lived in society hostile to Rousseau, and had spoken of him with the air of a judicious guardian; and when Rousseau, with the true perverseness of a madman, considered all this kindness as treachery, Hume started up to defend himself, as if he had been attacked by a scoundrel. Such intemperance drew from Madame de Boufflers a letter of expostulation to Hume, in which she complained of his precipitate appeal to the world against a suffering and wayward man. "Have you recommended to the Baron d'Holbach to be silent, or to circulate your complaints of Rousseau? The public, not yet fully informed, considers them as bitter, and is of opinion that the baron,

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in divulging the warmth of your indignation, has not served your cause. Your mildness, your goodness, your natural indulgence, made people expect and desire from you efforts of moderation beyond the reach of ordinary men. The letter of Rousseau, no doubt, is atrocious; it is the last degree of extravagance: do not suppose, however, that he is guilty of artifice or falsehood; his anger is unfounded, but I have no doubt it is sincere. It is said that one of the best phrases of Mr. Walpole's letter* is yours: if this is true, and Rousseau came to know it,—sensitive, hasty, melancholy, and proud, as he is said to be,—can you wonder he should be mad with rage? Such, I imagine, is the source of his deplorable alienation; for to accuse him, as you do, of a premeditated design to injure you, is to say what is very improbable. Every human interest, his glory, his reputation, is the other way. If you abandon him, he is without support, without resource, without consolation; and you suppose that, in cold blood, in the full use of his reason, he exposes

* Alluding to the well-known letter of Horace Walpole, written in the name of the King of Prussia.

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himself to such misfortunes.—No! it is impossible. If he believed you had a share in the letter, it may excuse him a little, though certainly not enough. But you! instead of being irritated against an unhappy man, who cannot injure you, and who only ruins himself, —why did not you allow yourself to be swayed by a generous compassion? You would have avoided an *éclat* which divides opinion, gives scope to malignity, amuses idle people at the expense of both, and renews the clamour against philosophers and philosophy." While Madame de Boufflers wrote thus sensibly to Hume, she addressed to Rousseau a letter, far more severe, on the ingratitude and intemperance of his conduct. For some time after she seems to have given up his case as hopeless, which drew from him a melancholy appeal to her compassion: but of that hereafter.

The quiet residence of Wootton soon ceased to please Rousseau. His mistress quarrelled, from morning till night, with an old housekeeper of ninety: he himself complained of Mr. Davenport; and his frenzy augmented daily. He began to imagine that he was a

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prisoner in England, for some purpose of his enemies; and resolved to try whether he was at liberty. He confessed, long afterwards, that he was at this period under the influence of a fit of insanity. The fact is thus related by Corancèz, a man of letters; who, in the latter part of his life, was much in his intimacy:—"We had made a party to go together to Meudon with our wives, and to dine there. In conversation at table, he related to us, that his departure from England had been more a flight than a journey. He had got in his head that M. de Choiseul, then minister in France, had ordered him to be sought for, either to gratify his enemies, or for some cause I do not remember. His alarm was such, that he set off without money, and without any baggage that was not of the most absolute necessity. It was on this occasion that he burnt the new edition of 'Émile;' which, he confessed to me, he greatly regretted. He paid his way with a piece of a silver spoon or fork, which he broke at the inns. He arrived at the port; the wind was contrary: *he considered this circumstance as part of a plot, and the consequence of orders*

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given to retard his departure, for some end or interest of his enemies! Although he did not speak the language of the country, he got upon a height and harangued the people, who did not understand a word of his discourse.— Let my readers bear in mind, that it is from Rousseau himself that I received all these details. — He added, that he could not disguise from me, or from himself, that it was an attack of insanity. 'It went so far,' he continued, pointing to his wife, 'that I suspected even this excellent woman of being in the plot, and in correspondence with my enemies.'"

On the 21st of May, three weeks after leaving Wootton, he arrived at Calais. On the 23d he set out for Amiens, where he had a long and interesting conversation with the poet Gresset, whom he charmed by his simple and natural eloquence. On taking leave of Gresset, he said to him,—"I am convinced that, before you saw me, you had a very different opinion of me; but it is no wonder that you, who know so well how to make parrots speak, should be able to make bears tame." Had Gresset seen him the

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week before, he would have found him haranguing on Dover heights, and attributing the direction of the wind to the Duke of Choiseul: so short is the interval between the highest powers of reason and the wanderings of madness!

In the following month he took up his abode at Trie-le-Château, a house belonging to the Prince of Conti, who had commissioned the Marquis of Mirabeau to offer him an apartment. He took the name of Renou, declaring that he was dead to literature, and that he would read nothing which might revive his old ideas. The Marquis of Mirabeau having sent him one of his works, he acknowledged the present by some able and sagacious remarks*; ending, however, with these lines: —"And now, illustrious friend of man, and mine, I throw myself at your feet, to conjure you to have pity on my state and my misfortunes; to leave in peace my dying head; to awaken no more, ideas almost extinct, and which cannot return but to swallow me up in a new abyss of misfortunes. Reserve to me

* Corr. July 26. 1767.

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your friendship; but send me no more books, and do not ask me to read any."

The Prince of Conti had done every thing in his power to make his residence agreeable. He had told his steward not to offer any thing, but to place every thing at his disposal: yet Rousseau had not been at Trie two months, before he wrote to ask Madame de Luxembourg whether he might leave the house without offending the prince.* He complained that "the whole household of the

* A letter he wrote from Trie to Madame de Boufflers paints the misery of his mind.—"Madam, you are not exempt from wrongs towards me; I feel mine, but have my misfortunes done nothing to expiate them? . . . . . See whom you sacrifice, and to whom! I ask of you one hour between heaven and you for this comparison. Recollect the time when you were every thing for me. How will your benevolent kindness be honoured one day or other! Then, why destroy your own work? Men of skill and worldly reputation can do any thing during their lives: they easily fascinate the eyes of the multitude, which always admires prosperity; but their credit does not survive them, and their intrigues are at last discovered. . . . . I venture to predict that, sooner or later, my memory will be honoured. Must you then have to say to yourself, 'I saw dragged through the mire, without pity, a man worthy of esteem, who deserved well of me?' No, madam, ... for your own sake, draw me out of the abyss of iniquity in which I am plunged. Let me finish my days in peace: it depends on you," &c.

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prince, the Jesuits, the peasants," had been excited against him; that they refused him vegetables for months together. In 1768 he left Trie, and, after some wanderings, established himself at Bourgoin, in Dauphiny. An obscure person of the name of Thevenin, who claimed from him a false debt of nine francs, threw him into dreadful agony; and, from this moment, the notion of a general plot against him seems to have got so strong a hold of his mind, as never to have been afterwards removed. The Duke of Choiseul having delayed a short time in sending him a passport, he felt assured that it was for the purpose of raising against him enemies in the place he was going to. He himself complains, in a long letter he wrote at this time, that after his return from England, "his head, already influenced by the gloomy air of that, country, grew more and more affected:" yet, for some time, he thought either of returning to England, or of going to Minorca. But at length, persuaded that his enemies would circumvent him every where, that his papers were stolen for the purpose of altering them, that D'Alembert and the men of letters

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were in confederacy with the parliament and the ministry to ruin his reputation, he determined to go at once to Paris, the centre of the intrigue, and defend his honour. "Honour and duty call," he said; "I listen to no voice but theirs."

While at Bourgoin he contracted what he called a marriage with Thérèse le Vasseur, by calling her his wife before two witnesses.

His arrival at Paris was a signal occasion for his friends and admirers to show themselves. In a letter, dated July 1770, he says, "Since my arrival I have been so loaded with dinners and visits, that, if it lasts, I shall not be able to bear it, and unfortunately I want courage to refuse. However, if I do not speedily take to another course of life, my stomach and my botany are in great danger. This is not the way to resume copying music in a very lucrative way; and I fear that, by dint of dining out, I shall end by dying of hunger at home. My wounded soul, I feel, required some dissipation: but here is no limit; and I would rather live entirely within myself, than quite out of myself."

His chief occupation at Paris was the re-

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visal and correction of his Memoirs. When they were finished, he read them to a select society. This took place several times, although he has recorded only one, and that a signal failure;* for his object evidently was to turn the general indignation against the objects of his displeasure. Madame D'Epinay complained formally of these readings. Rousseau was sent for to the police, and, probably, gave his word not to continue them. He lodged at Paris in the Rue Plâtrière, with a retired grocer, whose wife pleased him by her natural manners. Yet he did not entirely avoid the society of the higher classes. Madame de Genlis, Dussaulx, and many others, have given accounts of their acquaintance with him. Sometimes, too, he supped with Sophie Arnaud, the heroine of the opera, cele-

* His audience was composed of five persons of high rank. Having recorded his declaration, that he had told nothing but the truth, he adds, "I thus finished my reading; every one was silent. Madame d'Egmont was the only one who appeared to me to be affected: she evidently shook, but she quickly regained her tranquillity, and kept silent, as well as the rest of the company. Such was the fruit of this reading, and of my declaration." The company probably concluded him mad: and this is, in fact, the only excuse for writing such a book.

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brated for her wit. It was she who, seeing the head of the Duke of Choiseul placed on the reverse of a medal of Sully, said, "I suppose it means receipts and expenses."

Yet his unhappy complaint was making daily progress; he became more and more suspicious, seeing in every circumstance a proof of the inveterate malignity of his enemies. Corancèz one day informed him that the "Devin du Village" had been performed the evening before with the most complete success. Rousseau grew red with anger: "Will they never cease persecuting me?" he cried. His informant showing much surprise, he explained himself by saying, that his enemies, not having been able to cry down his opera, had accused him of being a plagiary; and it was, no doubt, with a view to aggravate his offence that they loaded his work with praise. It is melancholy to see him in this unhappy temper of mind, ever banishing some one of his friends, and then, from the susceptibility of his heart, admitting new intimacies, to be speedily dissolved in a similar manner. One of the latest of these new friends was Bernardin de St. Pierre, who gives an interesting

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account of his manners and behaviour. Being one day ill-received, he left off his visits: Rousseau met him afterwards in the street, and asked him why he did not come. "You know the reason," answered St. Pierre. "There are days," replied Rousseau, "when I wish to be alone: I come home so tranquil, so contented with my solitary walks! There I have behaved ill to no one; no one has behaved ill to me. I should be sorry to see you too often, but I should be still more sorry not to see you at all." He added, with great emotion, "I fear intimacy; I have closed my heart. My ill-humour gets the better of me: do not you perceive it? I restrain it for some time — I can hold out no longer — it starts forth in spite of me. I have my faults; but when one values the friendship of any person, one must take the evil with the good." Unfortunately the friends of Rousseau did not observe this rule; too many of them drove their little vanity into collision with his morbid sensibility, and friendship was lost in the shock.

At length his complaints took the shape of undisguised insanity: to be convinced of this, we need only read the narrative of Corancèz,

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"For some time I had perceived a striking change in his appearance: I saw him often in a state of convulsion, that altered his face so that I should not have known him, and rendered his expression really frightful. In this state his eyes seemed to wander over all space, and see every thing at once, but, in fact, they saw nothing. When in this state, he would turn in his chair, and passing his arm over the back, give it a motion like that of the pendulum of a clock. When I saw him in this posture, which happened occasionally for four years before his death, I always expected the most extravagant discourse, and I never was deceived in this expectation. It was in this situation that he said to me one day, 'Do you know why I give so marked a preference to Tasso?'—'No,' I replied; 'but I suppose it is because Tasso, coming after Homer and Virgil, has been able to profit by their beauties, and avoid their faults.'—'There is something in that,' he answered; 'but learn that he has predicted my misfortunes.'—I started. —'I understand you,' he continued; 'Tasso lived before me: how could he know my misfortunes? I do not know, and, probably,

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he did not know himself; but, however, he has predicted them. Observe that Tasso has this peculiarity, that you cannot take from his poem a stanza, from a stanza a verse, and from a verse a single word, without making the whole poem fall to the ground, so strictly did he confine himself to his subject. Well! take away the stanza of which I speak, no injury is done — the poem remains complete. It has no relation to what goes before or after — it is absolutely useless. It is probable that Tasso made it involuntarily, and without understanding it himself; but it is clear.'"* This ingenuity of reasoning, joined to obvious delusion, forms a perfect character of madness.

While this fatal disease wore away the strength, the mind, and the happiness of its

* The following is the miraculous stanza, b. xii. st. 77.

" Vivrò frà i miei tormenti e le mie cure,
Mie giuste furie, forsennato errante.
Paventerò l' ombre solinghe e scure,
Che 'l primo error mi recheranno innante;
E del sol, che scoprì le mie sventure,
A schivo e in orrore avrò il sembiante.
Temerò me medesmo, e da me stesso
Sempre fuggendo, avrò me sempre appresso."

Alas! this dreadful picture was as applicable to the prophet as to the predicted.

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victim, it dissevered him, one after another, from nearly all his friends. Perhaps their conduct, however, is more astonishing than his. It is less extraordinary that a madman should break forth in unjust suspicions against those who wish to serve him, than that men in possession of a sound and informed understanding should resent his wild reproaches as warmly as if he were their equal in judgment and temper. It is, perhaps, to be attributed to the inordinate self-love of men of letters, that those who formed an intimacy with Rousseau nearly all ended by appealing to the public against him, as a false and ungrateful man. Hence he was for ever disturbed by new quarrels; and, what was scarce less tormenting, surrounded by new benefactors. Each consulted his own vanity far more than his friend's comfort in the services he volunteered to perform. Even Corancèz, who was one of the best of them, informs us that he commenced his acquaintance with Rousseau by procuring for him the payment of the pension allowed by the King of England, which for some years he had omitted to apply for. When he informed Rousseau what he had done, he was

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met by this very natural reply, — "I am of age, and able to manage my own affairs; I know not by what fatality strangers think to do better than I. I am perfectly aware that I have a pension; I received it during the first years after it was given with gratitude: if I do not receive it any longer, it is because I choose that it should be so. No doubt I must explain to you my motives; that at least seems to be required by the part you play in in this affair: I must constitute you a judge of these motives, in order to learn if you approve of them. I know not what will be your final opinion: but this I know, that I am free, and that if my motives have not your approbation, they have mine, and that is sufficient for my determination."

At length the end drew near: Thérèse being ill, Rousseau wished to give her the benefit of country air: several houses were offered him for this purpose, but two divided his judgment; one a small lodging of M. Corancèz at Sceaux, the other a cottage in the gardens of Ermenonville, the superb country house of M. Girardin. From choice, or timidity, or the persuasion of his mistress, he

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accepted the latter, and, on the 10th of May, left Paris for the last time.

With regard to the manner of his death there is much doubt. Two surgeons examined the body, and declared that he had died of a serous apoplexy. His mistress declared the same thing, and gave a minute account of the circumstances. M. Girardin, and his daughter, Madame de Vassi, threw the weight of their belief on this side. On the other hand, stories were circulated in the neighbourhood that Rousseau had terminated his own life; according to some, by a cup of coffee in which he had infused drugs; according to others, by a pistol-ball. The latter account was given to M. Corancèz by the master of the post near Ermenonville. It was corroborated by a hole in the forehead, which Thérèse said was made by a fall on the floor. Other circumstances are quoted; Madame de Staël affirms that she has seen letters of his written a short time before his death, announcing the design of terminating his existence; it is said, likewise, that a day or two before his end he discovered a passion of his unworthy mistress for a groom of M. Girardin,

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whom she afterwards married. Thus terminated, obscurely and ignobly, a life of so much celebrity.

There is no excess of which the effects are more extraordinary than an excess of sensibility. It would be supposed that a man of this temper would be continually lamenting over the misfortunes of his neighbours, and sacrificing his own happiness to procure that of his friends. But experience shows that he who has his nerves too finely organised, is so absorbed by his own sensations, as to be unable to give much of his attention to any cares but those that in some way affect himself. In the calm of his closet, or in the solitude of a forest, he may weep over the distresses of his fellow-creatures, and meditate an act of generosity to a family of orphans, or a splendid declamation in favour of the rights of humanity. But when he returns to real life, his frame is so irritated by the slightest obstacle, that he loses the thread of his intentions, and can think of nothing but the means of relieving the urgent pain that he suffers. The character of Rousseau was of this kind. Hume justly compares him to a man who has been skinned alive, and let loose in a wood to

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make his way through the brambles and briars by which he is beset on every side. From the beginning of his life, his whole being was employed in escaping the evils that the world put in his way, or in averting the dangers with which his own too subtle imagination surrounded his path. Hence, in the horror of being discovered in the commission of petty larceny, he made a false accusation against an innocent girl; and hence, in the embarrassment of taking charge of a companion, who had fallen into a fit, he abandoned his guide and friend. When the celebrity of his writings had relieved him from many of the petty anxieties of life, he conjured up spectres of his own, imagining himself the victim of a conspiracy of authors, and the object of a persecution of sovereigns. From being the most sensitive, he became first the most selfish, then the most suspicious, the most ungrateful, and lastly, the most unhappy and most pitiable of men. Suspicion grew into disease, and he ended his life a conscious lunatic.

The great blot in the character of Rosseau was undoubtedly the abandonment of his children. But it was not an unpunished

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fault; on the contrary, every hour of his subsequent life bears testimony to the fatal influence of his crime. We see this influence, in the first place, by his extreme anxiety to palliate his fault: he endeavours to show by details, that he could not have afforded to maintain his offspring, and that he had ascertained, by enquiry, that the institution where he sent them would provide for their comfortable subsistence. At another time, he paints an imaginary picture of the hatred which his children would have been taught to bear him. Yet he still felt, whatever truth there might be in these reasons, and even admitting that his children's fate was really improved by his determination, that he had been guilty against nature, and would be condemned by the universal opinion of his age. It was for telling this secret, therefore, that he quarrelled for ever with Diderot, and thus provoked the whole sect of philosophers. From this enmity between him and them, and from his want of a child to soften his solitary hours, sprang much of the bitterness of his soul: from this source, too, he was ever visited by remorse. "In meditating my 'Treatise on Education,'" he says, in his 'Confessions,' "I felt that I had

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neglected duties from which nothing could absolve me: my remorse at length became so strong, that it wrung from me what is almost the avowal of my fault, at the commencement of 'Emile,' &c." Let us look to the passage:— "Nothing can dispense a father from bringing up his children,—Reader, you may believe me:—I predict to any one who has feelings, and neglects a duty so sacred, that he will long shed bitter tears over his fault, *and will never be consoled.*"*

It was this same remorse, no doubt, that made him apply himself to the epithet in Tasso,—

> "Vivrò fra i miei tormenti e le mie cure,
> Mie giuste furie ———."

Hence the manners of Rousseau are associated in our imagination with those dark fits of suspicion and violent aberrations of mind which gave rise to the chief incidents of his life. But if we listen to those who lived with him at various periods, we shall be convinced that there was light as well as shade in the picture. M. d'Escherny, whose excursions with him in the mountains, have been before noticed, thus contrasts him with his reputation:—"Who would believe it! this Jean

* Emile, liv. i.

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Jacques, so well known for his misanthropy, was with us at Brot, and in all our excursions, the most simple, the mildest, and most modest of men: it is true that he was in his element; in a wild picturesque country; that he was at his ease with us," &c. Next let us hear David Hume before their unfortunate quarrel. "He is very amiable, always polite, gay often, commonly sociable. He has an excellent warm heart." Again, after six weeks' intimacy: — "He is mild, gentle, modest, affectionate, disinterested, and, above all, endowed with a sensibility of heart in a supreme degree." * Madame de Genlis, who, when in the height of youth and gaiety, knew Rousseau intimately, speaks thus of him: — "He had a most agreeable smile, full of kindness and intelligence. He was communicative, and I found him very gay: he reasoned admirably upon music, in which he was a real connoisseur. Rousseau came almost every day to dine with us; and I had not remarked in him, during nearly five months, either susceptibility or caprice, when," and thereupon follows a history of one of his fits of rage. Let us now borrow from Dus-

* Letters, published in 1820.

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saulx, who knew him at the latter period of his life, a description of a dinner-party of which he was the object:—"We met early; Jean Jacques did not make us wait: some passing clouds excepted, how agreeable he was that day! Sometimes gay, sometimes sublime: before dinner, he told us a few of the most innocent anecdotes of the 'Confessions;' in telling them, he gave them a new face, and more life still than in his book. I will venture to say that he did not know himself when he said that nature had refused him the gift of conversation; solitude had, no doubt, concentrated his talent within himself; but in moments of ease, when nothing disquieted him, he broke forth like an impetuous torrent, which nothing can resist. If he had practised oratory, and had been placed in a really popular assembly, who knows how far this fiery soul, so fraught with every kind of power, might have carried the eloquence of France?* We spoke of our great writers: making allow-

* This supposition seems to be contradicted by Rousseau's inability to speak before a Swiss consistory, or, to use his own expression, "to put his pen in his mouth."—See "Confessions."

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ance for his peculiar opinions, he characterised them all with justice, precision, and, above all, with an impartiality which seemed to tell us, that their glory was quite compatible with his. When he arrived at Voltaire, who had treated him so shamefully, instead of recrimination, Rousseau did entire justice to his fertility, and the variety of his talent. As for his character, he said only these remarkable words:—'I do not know any man upon earth whose first impressions have been more admirable than his.'

"He was moved at the sight of his own works:—'What pleasure and what pain have these people given me!' He approached, and caressed them one after another. His 'Emile' was treated with much, but still a parental, severity,—'What nights, what torments it cost me! and for what? to expose myself to the furies of envy and my persecutors. This child, oppressed from its birth, has never rewarded me with a smile: I know not what way it has made in the world. My 'Héloïse,' at least, gave me some happy hours, though I did not conceive it without pain; and it has been insulted.' During this long dinner, we

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seemed sometimes to listen to Plato, sometimes to Lucretius."

This account shall be followed by an extract from Bernardin de St. Pierre, who describes him in a different situation: — "The society of Rousseau pleased me much. He had not the vanity of the greater part of men of letters. He took his fair share in conversation, allowing others to talk, and adapting himself to their measure with so little pretension that among the common people he was looked upon as an equal, and by those of higher rank as their inferior; with them, indeed, he spoke little, which has been attributed to pride. But, among other traits, the following may convince the reader of his habitual humility. In returning from Mont Valérien, we were caught by a shower near the Porte Maillot: we went on and sought shelter under the chestnut-trees, where there was already a great crowd. While we were there, one of the waiters of the inn at the gate, perceiving Jean-Jacques, came to him with a joyful face, and said, 'Oh! honest man, where have you been? it is a very long time since we have seen you.' Rousseau an-

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swered quietly, that his wife had been very ill, and he himself had not been well. 'Oh! my poor honest man,' said the waiter, 'you are not well here; come, and I will find you a room in the house.' In effect, he found us a room at the top of the house, and, notwithstanding the crowd, a table and chairs, with bread and wine. This phrase of 'honest man,' said so sincerely by a person who probably took Jean-Jacques for a mechanic,—his joy at seeing him, and wish to serve him, convinced me that the author of 'Emile' was kind and simple in his smallest actions. Far from trying to shine, he allowed, with a rare feeling of modesty, which I think was in his case unjust, that he was not fit for conversation. 'What talent I have,' he said to me one day, 'comes half an hour too late; I know what to answer precisely when it is no longer of use.'"

The same author speaks of Rousseau in terms very different indeed from those used by Diderot and Grimm:—"Goodness of heart seemed to him superior to every thing; it was the basis of his character: he preferred a trait of sensibility to all the epigrams of

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Martial. He was gay, confiding, open, when he could give way to his natural character."*

Again, — "What I thought far superior to his genius was his probity. He was of the small number of men of letters tried by misfortune, to whom one can, without risk, communicate one's most secret thoughts: one had nothing to fear from him of malignity or falsehood. He shunned vanity with great sincerity, and attributed his reputation, not to his personal merits, but to some natural truths scattered in his writings."† Both Saint Pierre and Corancèz affirm that he never slandered any one. The former of these authors has thus described his person: — "He was thin and of middle size. One of his shoulders seemed rather more raised than the other: whether this was the effect of his posture in writing, or that age had bent him (for he was then sixty years old); he was otherwise very well made. His hair was dark; he had some colour in the pit of his cheeks, a handsome mouth, a well formed nose, the forehead round and high, the eyes full of fire. The oblique lines

* Œuvres de Bernardin de St. Pierre, tom. 12.

† Préambule à l'Arcadie, Œuvres de Bernardin de St. Pierre.

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which fall from the nostrils to the ends of the mouth, and which give a character to the face, expressed in his great sensibility, with something of pain. Three or four characters of melancholy might be remarked on his countenance,—in the depth of the eyes, the gathering of the eye-brows, the wrinkles in the forehead, — and a very lively and even caustic gaiety in a number of little folds outside the angles of the eyes, whose orbits disappeared when he laughed. When animated by conversation, his face took the impression of every passion which affected him : when calm, his face pourtrayed something intelligent and touching, worthy of pity and respect."

It is well known that Rousseau wrote his first work upon a question proposed by the Academy of Dijon. He describes himself in the "Confessions," as being suddenly struck, as he was walking to Vincennes, by such a multitude of feelings and ideas, that he fell under a tree, and passed half an hour in such an agitation, that, when he rose, he found himself bathed in tears, without knowing he had shed a single one. He describes his fulness of thought at that moment to have been such, that his first discourse, his

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work on Inequality of Ranks, and his "Emile," were but the full reflection of the brightness of his first inspiration. Diderot, indeed, has affirmed, that he first suggested to Rousseau the side he took on the question of Dijon; but, allowing the fact to be so, there can be no room to doubt the reality of his enthusiasm. His mind, formed as the dwelling of high thoughts, had been hitherto without a tenant worthy of so noble a habitation: his thoughts had been scattered on low objects; a spirit came to possess his soul, to animate his heart, to collect his energies. But let us use his own remarkable language: — "An unhappy academical question came of a sudden to unseal his eyes,—to arrange this chaos in his head—to show him another universe—a real golden age. From the effervescence which then worked in his head proceeded those sparks of genius which have been seen to shine in his writings during ten years of fever and delirium, but of which no gleam had hitherto appeared, and which probably would have shone no more, if when the fit was passed he had continued to write. Inflamed by the contemplation of great objects, he had them always present to

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his mind. Flattered with the ridiculous hope of making reason and truth prevail over prejudice and falsehood, and of making men wise by showing them their true interest, his heart, warmed by the idea of the future happiness of the human race, and by the honour of contributing to it, dictated to him language worthy of so great an enterprise. Obliged to meditate long and strongly on the same subject, he constrained his mind to the labour of reflection. He learned to think deeply; and, for a time, he astonished Europe by productions in which ordinary men saw nothing more than eloquence and talent." *

Amidst the contradictory appearances of extreme sensibility and want of common humanity displayed by Rousseau, there was one feeling which, from the beginning, remained consistent, and pervaded the whole course of his life. This was a feeling of unsatisfied pride, composed partly of that true dignity which makes man scorn to be the slave of man, and partly of that low envy which makes us hate to see others more fortunate

* Dialogue II.

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than ourselves. Born in a republic, Rousseau had a right to be exempt from the monarchical spirit that had hitherto animated nearly every great author in the French language. Living and writing in a luxurious capital, his self-love was continually offended by the protection ostentatiously offered in the houses and society of the great. His visions of the happiness of mankind were always blended with a sense of personal wrong.

Whatever may be thought, however, of the origin of his first works, we may be certain that it was the mind of Rousseau, and not the suggestion of Diderot, which governed the direction his writings took. His first Essay was followed, in 1754, by the "Discours sur l'Inégalité des Conditions." The spirit of this work he has himself attributed to Diderot; asserting that Diderot gave a dark misanthropical colour to all his speculations. The object of his essay is to prove that men owe their vices to civilisation, and more especially to the right of property. From this right, he asserts, springs first the relation of rich and poor, then that of powerful and weak; and, lastly, that of master and slave. It would seem that the

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end of this theory is to persuade the world to renounce the advantages of civilisation, and to return to the period when mankind fed upon acorns, or the earth was cultivated in common. But, as a theory, the essay is only a piece of wild declamation. The author seems sometimes to admit in the detail the benefits of civilisation, which he denies in the gross; and, with much inconsistency, approves of the savage hunter covering himself with the skin of a wild beast, though he cannot bear that a husbandman should make himself a coat out of the fleece of a sheep.

It was not this vague and useless theory, however, which gave his work a distinction beyond that of the many fanciful paradoxes which daily spring up on the subject of morals. The charm that fascinated his readers was an eloquent indignation against the power of kings and the privileges of aristocracy. He treated with the most bitter disdain the notion of families "becoming more illustrious in proportion to the number of idlers they had produced." He boldly asserted, with Locke, that despotism was in its nature illegal; that, at all events, men could not bind their posterity; and that

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a nation was justified in destroying a despotic government, by the same violent means which were used in support of it. When to these doctrines is added the opinion which runs through his book, that man is a benevolent being till corrupted by institutions and arts, it may be conceived that the work of Rousseau spoke to thousands of hearts. All who felt the dignity of their nature, and the debasement of their condition, kindled at the picture of their own worthiness, and the degeneracy of their masters. For the first time, the feelings of a misgoverned people had been embodied in language. Rousseau had collected the lightning from an atmosphere charged with electrical matter; and he could in future direct or conduct it to any heads he should be pleased to single out for destruction.

The philosophers, as they are called, were not equally rejoiced at his success. The epicurean admirers of Voltaire were alarmed at eloquence which roused the passions into action. The pupils of Montesquieu, who wished only to amend existing institutions, were perplexed by a doctrine which called for the destruction of the whole social edifice,

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and declared that nothing could be done by partial reforms.

Some years afterwards appeared the "Social Contract." This work may be said to contain the political system of Rousseau. Viewed as a system, however, it has the same defect as the former work — that of giving vague and shadowy generalities, instead of a regular and consistent theory. We see in this work, as in many others, an author who imagines that he has made discoveries by merely changing the use of words, and applying new terms to that which was already known. This essay, however, like the former, contained phrases that had the effect of a talisman. It was laid down as an axiom, that every act of sovereignty ought to emanate from the general will, which always means right; and though it may be deceived, can never be corrupted. Liberty and equality are declared to be the great ends of civil society: liberty is said to consist in the possession of sovereignty by the people; and equality, in such a distribution of riches, as well as of power, that no man shall be wealthy enough to be able to buy his neigh-

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bour, and no man poor enough to fall into dependence.

But it is necessary to take a more comprehensive view of the doctrines of Rousseau.

The guidance of the public mind had fallen completely into his hands. He alone strongly moved the soul of his readers: and such was his influence, that, in the rage of the Revolution itself, his name was proclaimed as that of its apostle. What, then, we naturally ask, were the principles he inculcated? Do they, or do they not, contain the seeds of crime and disorder, under the appearance of reform and universal benevolence? In answer to this question it may be affirmed, that the political axioms of Rousseau are little more than two. The one is, that the sovereignty of a state resides in the people; the other, that man is, by nature, a benevolent being, and that he is, therefore, fit to exercise the right of sovereignty he possesses. That sovereignty resides originally in the people, is an abstract position that few writers, in these days, will be found hardy enough to deny. All men being originally equal in rights, without any distinc-

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tion to mark a king or leader above his fellows, it follows that the right of government, which no one could claim exclusively, must have belonged to all. Nor can it be maintained with any plausibility, that men, in forming a government, renounced for ever the sovereignty which was inherent in themselves. In uniting together in political society, the individuals who compose a nation, seek for security for their property and their persons. If these objects are not obtained, it is evident as daylight that the nation may re-consider their act, may resume their trust, and endeavour to rectify by new provisions, the mistakes that they have made. This right, it is equally evident, does not depend upon the performance or violation of any contract, written or implied. That the government has broken the engagements into which it had entered — that the people have been deprived of the laws, and chartered liberties, which their ancestors had wisely provided — is perhaps the strongest of all reasons for exercising, but does not in itself constitute the right of resistance. Independently of all charters, and all statutes, nations have a clear and

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indisputable claim to all the benefits which government, consistently with its existence, can procure to society. Whether or not the people shall overturn a government already constituted, or perhaps long established, is a question that must be decided by a deliberate consideration of their own interests. Revolutions, it is well known, are attended often with bloodshed in the beginning, generally with peril in their progress, and not unfrequently with disappointment in their final result. It behoves every nation, therefore, to consider deeply of the prudence, and even of the humanity of beginning a contest which may involve themselves and their children in calamities that overbalance the evils to be shaken off, or that are not necessary as means of obtaining the good that is proposed. In short, the right of resistance, or the right of sovereignty, is subject to the same moral checks with nearly all other rights. A subject who raises the standard of rebellion against his sovereign, even though he be a tyrant, without a fair chance of success, commits an act of deep injury to his country. A people who overthrow a good government to set up a des-

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potism or dissolve into anarchy, are responsible to their posterity for all the evils which so wanton an act of power may produce. But it is impossible to deny that there are cases in which resistance is the most virtuous of actions, and the most sacred of duties.

In propounding this doctrine, however, of the sovereignty of the people, writers on government have gone much further than the experience of mankind will lead them, or the common sense of mankind is disposed to follow. It is a principle laid down by Locke, and adopted by Rousseau, that arbitrary government is a thing in its nature illegal; and that no taxes can be legally imposed but by a nation itself, or its representatives. Yet what is there which authorises us to say that a man may not allow his right of property to be decided by a single judge, acting at the moment upon his own opinion, in preference to a lawsuit carried on for years in a court of equity, to be decided by reference to precedent? or that when men have once agreed to place their lives at the disposal of their fellows, they may not leave the judgment to the unfettered opinion of one of their superiors, as well as to

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twelve equals and a hundred statutes? The institutions of nations must be fitted to the state of their knowledge and the extent of their desires: so long as the government is in harmony with the people, it must be allowed to be legal. Nor is it easy to see any benefit that would result from the prevalence of the opposite doctrine. If the subject of a despot can collect a force sufficient to overturn the despotism, and to establish a better form of government, he will be in the right to do so; but, if he cannot do this, it will be in vain for him to dispute the legality of an authority which can enforce obedience. But if it is not true, that an absolute government is *ex vi termini* less legitimate than any other, it may likewise be doubted whether the whole doctrine of the sovereignty of the people is not rather a theoretical abstraction than a useful practical doctrine. Political power is, generally speaking, a matter of permission; and so long as a nation is tranquil, easy, and obedient, it is impossible to say that the power which rules them is not *de jure*, as well as *de facto*, a legitimate government. Restore to the people their sovereignty; they will instantly delegate it

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afresh; and there are times when a nation is more faithfully represented by the sword of Cæsar than by the senate of Cato.

These reflections bring us to the second position of Rousseau. He affirms that law should be the expression of the general will of the sovereign people, which is incorruptible, and must prevail by virtue of a right that can neither be alienated nor divided. This position, it will be seen, leads directly to the doctrine, that a community may be governed, with respect to its laws at least, by the uncontrolled will of the community itself. Experience, however, has often shown to the world that will alone is unfit to be the regulator of civil society. One main object of government is to restrain the wickedness of man. The savage who leaves his native wilds to live under a government obtains protection for his property and his life. If he gives up the freedom of pitching his habitation where he lists, of plucking fruit from every tree, and drawing fish from every stream, he gains the liberty of walking unarmed without danger, by night and by day, and the privilege of leaving his house, his goods, and his crops,

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without fear of their being swept away by marauders: in short, he exchanges the solitary and incommodious liberty of savage life for the various and fruitful liberties of civil society. But if the government under which he has chosen to live be one where will is allowed to prevail, he is again exposed, in a less degree, certainly, but in a manner more intolerable, to the evils from which he sought to escape. His person and his property are subject to the cupidity, the revenge, or the caprice of the ruler of the state; and, although the exercise of such a power may be rare or casual, yet the fear is permanent and general. Nor can the subject be said to be safe whilst power exists any where uncontrolled. A Roman emperor who put his subjects to death for a mistake about a statue; the inquisitors of Venice, who ordered their victims to be arrested unawares, and drowned without trial; the democracy of Athens, who took away the lives of their citizens in order to plunder their property, were all tyrants, however different the names of the form of government. Despotism and democracy, indeed, bear a striking resemblance in many of

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their features, which was long ago pointed out by Aristotle. Each is suspicious, jealous, fearful, fond of flattery, cruel, capricious, and tyrannical. Aristocracy, again, when uncontrolled, is as much to be feared as either despotism or democracy. It has fewer caprices, fewer sudden fears, fewer arbitrary dislikes; but, on the other hand, it pervades the community more completely, hears every whisper that is uttered in the prison where it rules, and presses on all its subjects with a weight which, if more equal, is not the more tolerable. Nor, if it is generally wiser than a single despot in fostering the industry and wealth of its subjects, does it consider them in any other view than as useful animals, which must be kept in a condition to draw the plough for their masters. The spirit of an absolute aristocracy is reserved, proud, and secret; offending its subjects by insolence of demeanour still more than by abuse of administration. From the history of the world, therefore, it would appear that will, however general, cannot be considered as a good basis of government. Servile men, indeed, who worship authority, adore an arbitrary king:

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prejudiced men, who are dazzled by birth and wealth, cringe to an arbitrary aristocracy: enthusiastic or ambitious men, who think or affect to think that there is virtue in numbers, cry up an arbitrary multitude: but a philosopher, who weighs things calmly, sees, in all these disguises, the dominion of a frail, fallible mortal; and refuses to give unlimited power to a being whose mind may be clouded by all the varieties of error, and whose will may be perverted by all the whirlwinds of passion. Upon surveying the history of government, he sees that the raw material, man, must be manufactured into something artificial before he is fit for the purposes of government; that he must be "through certain strainers well refined" before he can assume the direction of his species. It is for this reason that all the most applauded governments, — Sparta, Rome, England, Holland, — have been formed upon the principle of mutual control. It is by dividing power among different orders and classes; by multiplying forms and privileges; by giving the people an attachment to settled rules of proceeding, and a habit of loving justice; by filtering the turbid current of

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popular opinion through various modes of deliberation and of counsel; by giving a sanctity to judicial bodies, before which rank and riches bend in submission; and, finally, by opposing a check to every act of passion, whether in chief, nobles, or people, that the whole society is protected against the abuse of those faculties of government, the right use of which produces some of the greatest of human blessings.

It has, therefore, been the object of wise legislators to bind down the monstrous giant of power, like Gulliver in fable, with a thousand minute cords and unseen hinderances, to check every motion that might be formidable, to confine every limb and every joint, lest "the little finger of prerogative should prove heavier than the loins of the law." For this reason it is, that a people exercised in liberty have numerous securities in their ancient maxims and habits, which it would be impossible for any lawgiver of the hour to insert in a new written constitution.

Rousseau himself, whose mind was naturally clear, seems to have been fully sensible of these truths. We find, accordingly, that in the

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preface to his "Discourse," addressed to the governors of Geneva, he says, "that it is, above all, the great antiquity of laws which renders them sacred and venerable: the people soon despise those which they see changed every day; and in accustoming ourselves to neglect old usages, under the pretext of doing better, we often introduce greater evils to correct less. I would avoid above all, as necessarily ill governed, a republic where the people should have imprudently kept in their own hands the administration of civil affairs, and the execution of their own laws: such must have been the rude constitution of the first governments, coming immediately out of a state of nature; and this was one of the vices that destroyed the republic of Athens." * He especially warns the French nation against supposing, that a theory of government suited to a pure and simple republican people can be applicable to their condition. This warning, it must be confessed, is somewhat like that which he afterwards gave to young girls not to read the "Nouvelle Héloïse;" it stimulates the

* Dédicace, p. 12.

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desire which it professes to repress. Yet, in the "Social Contract," to the same purpose, he says, "that democracy is a government only fit for a people of gods, and unsuited to fallible man." When writing, many years afterwards, to the Marquis of Mirabeau, who had presented him with a book in which legal despotism was cried up as the best of governments, he says, "The science of government is a science of combinations, applications, and exceptions, according to time, place, and circumstance. The public can never see clearly the various relations of all these. And what will become of the sacred right of property in times of extraordinary calamity, when the *salus populi suprema lex* is proclaimed by the despot? Gentlemen, permit me to tell you, you allow too much to your own calculations, and not enough to the inclinations of the human heart and the influence of the passions. Do you not know that a man is guided rarely by his reason, and frequently by his passions? See what, according to my old notions, is the great problem in politics, which I compare to the quadrature of the circle in geometry, and to that of the longitude in astronomy; *to find*

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a form of government which shall place the law above man."* It was in search of a solution for this insoluble problem that Rousseau, like many an ingenious calculator, made a blunder and mistook it for a discovery. In placing the legislative power entirely in the people, he adopted a metaphysical distinction both unfounded and dangerous. Where has the legislative power existed alone? Must not those who make the law continually watch that those who are charged with executing it do not forget or betray their duty? And, in exercising this superintendence, do they not, in a certain degree, become themselves executive? Do they not leave the general law for the particular case? A reflection so obvious seems not to have struck Rousseau, or his disciples. Carried away by a metaphysical vision, they conceived the idea of a people framing perfect laws, to be left to the execution of infallible governors. He and his followers seemed to expect a golden age, still more happy than the state of savage life, the advantages of which he had so much exagger-

* Corréspondance, July 26. 1767.

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ated. They spoke of a new and better era of government, to be formed after the destruction of all, even the best forms existing at the time. They called this blessed age the age of reason. They forgot that the will and the fancy form as indestructible a part of man as his understanding; and, in the blindness of their enthusiasm, they displayed all the eloquence that can rouse the passions, and exhibited the most brilliant prospects that ever inflamed the imagination, in order to persuade men to renounce their passions and their imagination. It was a magnificent dream; but, alas! it was a dream. "Happy the man," says a Spanish writer, "who died at the commencement of the French revolution. He died with visions of glory in his mind!"

Yet Rousseau can hardly be blamed for indulging himself in these theories. He lived in a paradise of his imagination. At times, perhaps often, indeed, he doubted of the truth of his speculations: but he was an author, and having satisfied himself with declaring that "the world of illusions was the only one fit to live in," he left his foundlings to the public care. But what shall we say to the govern-

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ment which, by a timely reform, might have prevented almost the existence, certainly the prevalence, of such fatal notions? It was because all abuses were preserved, because no approach was made to good administration, that the French indulged in the reveries of the citizen of Geneva. It was supposed at the time, by some, that this was a benefit. Even in England it was said and written, that a people in the enjoyment of free discussion, without the incumbrance of a practical free government, were more likely to discover a perfect model of a political constitution, than a nation whose attention was taken up in defending the old forms of an imperfect liberty. They have been thoroughly undeceived. It has appeared that the abuses of the French government, so totally beyond all capability of improvement, gave a loose to wild theories of government, just as the abuses of the Roman Catholic church, so utterly incompatible with reason, gave a fashion to the doctrines of infidelity.

Of the celebrated "Nouvelle Héloïse" this is not the place to say much. It was composed at the Hermitage, in a fit of amorous ecstasy,

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which occupied the heart and mind of its author. He wrote out the letters of Julie on small gilt paper, sanded them with blue and silver sand, folded and sealed them with nonpareil blue, and read them to himself with all the transport of a lover who has received a love-letter from his mistress.* He persuaded himself that as there was nothing so revolting as the picture he had seen daily in the world of married women, who kept a good countenance, but acted without restraint in secret; so a young girl, who yields to her love, and afterwards becomes a virtuous wife, might be made a character to admire. Laying aside this absurdity, it must be confessed that the eloquence of passion was never carried further than in these letters; and that some of the scenes, especially that of the voyage on the lake, in the latter part, are wrought up with a power, and a truth of feeling, which no one else but Richardson ever reached. If we compare Julie with Clarissa, it will be found that the advantage of style is in favour of Rousseau: his accessaries likewise, his Claire, Lord Edward, and Wolmar, though

* Conf. Mém. de Madame de Genlis.

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none of them very interesting, are far superior to the brutal Harlowes, the detestable inmates of the brothel, and the low associates of Lovelace. But, on the other hand, the story of Julie, after the first period, slackens in interest, while that of Clarissa rises to the end; and as to the character of the heroine (which, in fact, forms the moral), what is the repentance and household virtues of Julie to the sublime conduct and angelic purity of Clarissa?

The "Nouvelle Héloïse" was so popular at its first appearance in the world, that it was let at twelve sous a volume, and only one hour was allowed to read a whole volume. When Rousseau wrote the "Nouvelle Héloïse," he was forty-five years old.

Of all the works of Rousseau perhaps the most remarkable is Emile. But it is the latter part especially which is the most impressed with the talent of its author. In the two first volumes, he treats of a new manner of forming the character and exercising the understanding of children: his theory upon this subject, defended as it is by fine and just observations, leaves on the mind much more admiration of his ingenuity than conviction of his wisdom.

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In the latter volumes he gives his own opinions on all subjects; on literature, on history, on love, on religion: all, however much we may differ from him, treated with profound thought, and a lofty, melancholy feeling. The eighteenth century, that age of daring speculation and unfettered reason, has not produced any work more extraordinary than the third volume of Emile: it is the type of the time, and tended to produce that revolution which it so clearly predicts.

Let us now, in the last place, consider the influence which the writings, and the men whom we have reviewed, had upon the destiny of their country. This is a speculation useful, not only in order to know the past, but also to enable us, in some measure, to anticipate the future; for the works of Voltaire and Rousseau are still the staple of the reading part of the French nation.

The most interesting and the most amusing of the productions of Voltaire were written, it must be remembered, to please the taste of a society in the last stage of corruption. No severe moral is enforced, no steady principle is drawn, either from religion or from reason;

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no sacrifice is made of amusement to decency or to delicacy; no attempt to rouse the soul to the higher feelings of purity and virtue. The persons addressed, it is manifest, are the upper classes; and of the upper classes, more especially the licentious and the depraved. Their luxury, their pride, their forgetfulness of their duties to God and man, are seldom, or never, disturbed. The emotion that is raised is exactly sufficient to excite the attention, but not to alarm the nerves, of profligate nobles and licentious ladies. No allusion is made to those more lofty and more noble parts of our nature, by appealing to which the great masters of literature have struck out a path to immortality. The imagination is seldom warmed with the fancies of a free and pure intellect. The mind, indeed, is taught to think; but the heart is not taught to feel. Absurd prejudices and gross superstitions are knocked down, sometimes by a giant's arm, sometimes by a slight touch of the finger; but nothing solid or permanent is built up in their place. I is all a satirical, or a lively, or a rhetorical arrangement of points and circumstances. Instead of any rule of morals, of

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any elevation of mind, we have only a general protest against inhumanity, adapted to produce a spurious benevolence, that spares the vicious as easily as it relieves the virtuous, that is indulged without sacrifice or effort, and is too weak in its foundation to withstand any strong temptation of personal interest.

Such a writer, it is manifest, may be of some use in persuading the powerful not to be tyrants, but is a most unfit preceptor for a people whose education is commencing.

Rousseau is the contrary of all this. He saw with disdain, and even with horror, the vicious practice of the court, and the indulgent theory of their dependent authors. He endeavoured to raise a spirit that should tower above such grovelling customs, and soar on eagle wings among the clouds. In part he succeeded: he created an enthusiasm for virtue; and, in some instances, induced the nobles and their wives to abandon old habits for reforms suggested by his eloquence. That eloquence, however, was exerted, not to produce a regular observation of a system of morality, but to excite the feelings to a vague admiration for purity and benevolence. The

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spirit that he produced was that known among us by the name of sentiment: the heart was chosen umpire in all questions of the conduct of man in society. Thus the ancient laws of morality, those general edicts which are the fruit of human experience and divine command, were thrown aside, and the exception was established instead of the rule. There can be nothing more dangerous to the peace and happiness of society: it requires but little observation to know, that those persons who trust to feeling as the guide of their conduct are liable to be led away far from the path of duty. It is but seldom, especially in the present state of society, that men and women are called upon to perform any thing that can be styled heroic: but persons who are governed by feeling are perpetually on the watch for an opportunity to perform something striking and memorable, and missing their opportunity, do nothing worthy of praise. Their whole thoughts are wound up to so high a pitch, that the common events of life find them wholly unprepared. Their rules of morality are made to suit contingencies that scarcely ever occur, and to provide for distresses that are seldom

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seen: they are totally wanting in those statutes for ordinary cases, which exist in the mental code of every virtuous man. There are many who would have immortalised themselves, if any occasion had happened in which they had been called upon to sacrifice life and fortune for their friends, and who yet have gone through a long career remarkable only for vanity, inutility, and selfishness. The heart, left on all usual events to its own guidance, blinds us to our faults, and too often makes that which is the most agreeable to our passions appear the most consonant to our duty. In short, the substitution of sentiment for principle is a recurrence to those early times of society when the feelings of individuals decided upon every separate case, and no comprehensive laws of morality had been established for the regulation of life.

It is not the least dangerous part of characters of this sort, that such persons have a thorough confidence in themselves, and a conscience ever satisfied and triumphant. The enthusiasm for virtue which they feel, excites their spirits, intoxicates their minds, and makes them blind to the real nature of their acts.

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They console themselves for the imperfection of all they do, by reflecting on the sublime virtue of what they would do in imaginary cases. Errors are justified, even crimes are effaced, by this wild and arrogant feeling of superior purity of intention. Well, indeed, has the founder of the Christian religion inculcated humility as the base of all virtue, and the best security for rectitude of life!

The doctrine of Rousseau, it cannot be wondered at, had numerous and powerful disciples. Nothing is more delightful in the circle of human emotions than a pure admiration for virtue, and an inward consciousness of benevolence; nothing more calculated to engage partisans than a theory which cast away the more rugged and harsh parts of morality, and preserved only the agreeable and inviting. Above all, the doctrine was fitted for those high and generous spirits who burnt for enterprise and action. In the general stagnation of the political world, men were glad to leave the petty intrigues of low-minded statesmen to indulge in the splendid vision of an age to come. Rousseau, more than any other man, inspired a longing for virtue, and a notion of

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the perfectibility of our species. The books of the age, the tone of society, caught this spirit. There have been times when men were impressed with a belief in the approaching destruction of the world. In the eighteenth century, they seem to have expected that it would be re-constituted, and a new order of things arise infinitely preferable to the old. Philanthropy was the motto of the age: war, conquest, persecution, tyranny, oppression, were to be eradicated from the globe; every thing was to be re-modelled on a new scheme. The political reveries of Rousseau became the plans of the active men of the growing generation.

Beyond Voltaire and Rousseau, or rather beneath them, were ranged another school of philosophers, who signalised themselves by a false taste in writing, a false system in morals, and an absurd theory in religion. But before we go further, let us pause a short time on this title of philosophers bestowed on themselves by the writers of the eighteenth century.

The ancient sages, who, disclaiming all right to dictate on subjects above human compre-

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hension, called themselves merely *lovers of wisdom*, justified by their conduct the title they assumed. Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicurus were to be found perpetually in the Lyceum, the Portico, or the Garden, discussing with their hearers the knowledge of the true good, the nature of the soul, the final end of the creation, and the eternal existence of the Creator. Disdaining or passing by the superstitious idolatry of their countrymen, they were, for the greater part, teachers of natural religion, lifting their eyes upwards to God, and endeavouring to ascertain, by examination and discussion, the course of life which would be most agreeable to a supreme and faultless Deity. However their disciples may have degenerated into verbal dispute, and a burlesque of the original doctrine, the masters themselves are worthy of continual honour, as men who wished to purify and elevate humanity by the loftiness of their sentiments and the sublimity of their ends. Socrates, Plato, and even Zeno, deserve this commendation.

But the French philosophers of the eighteenth century are of a different class. What

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the ancients had called philosophy, had passed with the doctrines of Christianity into the hands of the teachers of religion. The new philosophers had no religion to establish, no new road to wisdom of which they were the guides. They professed to destroy superstition, to enlighten the mind, to inculcate philanthropy. But in all this they were merely men of letters; commenting and disputing with much talent and ingenuity certainly, but without any consistent system to replace the old opinions, which they treated with so much contempt. Their days were passed amid the little rivalries of authorship; at the tables of hospitable and rich friends, whose wine enlivened discussion; at the evening parties of literary ladies, where news and gossip took their turn with metaphysics and poetry. They wrote epigrams from malice, pamphlets for fame, and books for bread; destroying rather from conceit and heedlessness, than from reflection or profound design; and many of them, in total ignorance of the world, fancying that they could live in a perpetual paradise of good dinners and smart sayings, under the rule of that

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very monarchy which they were undermining by their writings and their doctrines.

Let us glance at some of the chiefs of this school: —

Denis Diderot, born in 1713, was the son of a cutler of Langres, in Champagne. When he was eight years of age he commenced his studies under the Jesuits of that place; and being intended for the church, at twelve he received the tonsure. The Jesuits, according to their usual practice, finding the boy had lively parts, endeavoured to make him a recruit for their order; and his indulgent father, observing his son's inclination, carried him to the College d'Harcourt at Paris. After placing him there, the cutler stayed a fortnight at an hotel; and then visiting his son, said to him, "If you are not well here, if you are not happy, we will return together to your mother: if you like better to stay here, I come to preach to you, to embrace you, and bless you." The boy decided to remain; but after going through his course of studies, he was not inclined to be a Jesuit; and when his father proposed to him his choice of the profession of a physician, a lawyer, or a solicitor,

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he declined all three. "But," said M. Clement, with whom he had been placed, "what will you be?"—"In truth," answered Diderot, "nothing — nothing at all. I love study; I am very happy — very content; I want nothing more." His father, who had no conception of earning a livelihood by literary labour, tried to starve him into compliance; but to the honour of female kindness, his mother sent him from time to time a few louis, by the hands of a maid-servant, who three times walked from Langres to Paris (sixty leagues) and back, to assist the young prodigal.

Diderot thus early led a life of alternate gaiety and misery, debauchery and labour. He taught mathematics, but grew impatient with a dull pupil; he wrote sermons, and provided the payment was prompt, his pen was so likewise; dedications, addresses, puffs, and prefaces, he would furnish at all times; for immediate relief he would write any thing, for regular subsistence he would do nothing. In this situation he fell in love with a Mademoiselle Champion, whose mother was the widow of a ruined manufacturer: she, on her side, was charmed with her admirer. Madame Champion

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in vain complained that the "gilded tongue" of Diderot had turned the head of her daughter. The old cutler, however, frowned on so imprudent a match; the young lady, with proper pride, refused her consent; Diderot fell dangerously ill, and did not recover till Mademoiselle Champion visited and promised to marry him. She was to him the best and most affectionate of wives, but ill were her confidence and attachment repaid.

Diderot, after his marriage, insisted that his wife should give up a mode of industry by which she was brought into intercourse with strangers; and it was at this time, in a state near to destitution, that he projected the plan of the Encyclopédie. A bookseller agreed to give him (all he asked) twelve hundred francs a year; and thus was this great work commenced on the most slender foundation.

The wife of Diderot had gone to Champagne, to reconcile his father and mother to the marriage, when Diderot formed a connection with a Madame Puisieux, a vicious and worthless woman. Whenever his mistress wanted money, he wrote a sceptical treatise, or a ribald tale, to satisfy her extravagance. At

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length he discovered this woman's infidelity. But his subsequent life did not make amends to his injured wife. The quiet affection of his home was not sufficient to bind his restless and tempestuous character; something of sentiment, something of metaphysics, and a large mixture of vice, were requisite in the woman who should fix his affections. A new mistress, a Mademoiselle Voland, who united these attractions, absorbed and governed him during the remainder of his life.

It is at this part of his career that we have the most authentic details of his manners and conduct, from the correspondence published by his daughter. He was in the habit of visiting the Baron d'Holbach at his country house at Grandval; and his letters from thence present an accurate, though not a tempting picture of the society in which he lived.

The great labour of his life, however, was the writing and printing of the Encyclopédie. The union of D'Alembert with himself, and the preliminary discourse emanating from a man of so great a reputation in the scientific world, gave, naturally, fame to the work. But besides this there was a factitious vogue arising

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from the attempt of the principal editors to combine the destruction of religion with the teaching of science; and to instruct men, at one and the same time, how to make a stocking and eradicate Christianity. The ministry and the parliament were alarmed at this design; the church prepared its thunders, and the car was rolled along, fighting every inch, through hosts of enemies defended by as zealous partisans. In 1753, appeared the third volume, which was immediately stopped at the printer's. In 1757, a similar obstacle prevented the publication of the seventh; the enemies of the work even attempted to take it into their own hands, but discovered, to their surprise and mortification, that they wanted knowledge and abilities for their undertaking. The editors, to prevent a similar misfortune, determined to bring out the last ten volumes together. Four years afterwards Diderot was shocked to find that what the censors had not done, his printer had done. *Quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barberini.* This ignorant, or timid, or prudent printer struck out all the boldest passages of his articles, and destroyed the manuscripts. Still the work, after twenty years of labour,

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drew to its conclusion; and, with much of merit, much of trumpery, containing much true science, and much false philosophy, obtained for its editors the fame of being the founders of a work of which the world had hitherto seen no example. In the seventeen folio volumes which formed the giant labour, there was, indeed, the greatest disparity to be found: many of the articles came from the pens of the greatest writers in France; many from the lowest drudges in literature, who wrote for their daily bread. The most opposite opinions were inculcated within a few pages; and when the reader was referred to another article for the exposition of a doctrine imperfectly developed, he frequently found a refutation instead of a proof. The plates were often rendered useless by the absence of text to explain them; there were figures without descriptions, and descriptions without figures.

Still the work was a very extraordinary one; Diderot's part alone would fill three quarto volumes, and treated of many very curious subjects, on which he had qualified himself to teach.

While thus employed, every recruit in lite-

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rature came to him for patronage; and Diderot, with a generosity which speaks well for his disposition, was ever ready to give his time and his labour to any acquaintance, or even stranger, who could excite his spontaneous sympathy. One day a young man left a manuscript, which, on perusal, Diderot found to be a virulent satire on himself. When the young man came back, Diderot remonstrated with him, and said he had obliged him to read a satire for the first time in his life. The young man said he wanted bread, and was in hopes that Diderot would give him something to suppress it. "You may do much better," answered our author: "the brother of the Duke of Orleans is a saint, and hates me mortally: dedicate your satire to him; have it handsomely bound, and stamped with his arms, and one morning wait upon him with it."—"But the dedication——"—"Do not trouble yourself about that," answered Diderot; "sit down." He then penned a suitable epistle, and gave it to the young man, who got twenty-five louis for his labour. When he returned to thank his benefactor,

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Diderot good-humouredly advised him to take to some less disreputable calling.

The society at Grandval was composed of men of similar opinions, and the family of the Baron d'Holbach. That it was gay, full of wit and talent, easy, and enjoyable, there can be little question; but, at the same time, such licence of speculation, such disorder of ideas, such blasphemy, such extravagance of doctrine, and such indecency of language, perhaps, never prevailed in any civilised company of men and women. These reformers of the age, and prophets of a new deliverance, adopted all the vices of the court and clergy which they sought to supplant, omitting only the refinement by which they were partially disguised, and the fear of God by which they were sometimes restrained.

Diderot had expensive tastes, gaming among others, for which his literary labours did not entirely provide. He projected a sale of his library; which coming to the ears of the Empress of Russia, she gave him a large sum for it, desired he might keep it for his life, and insisted on his receiving an annual pension as librarian.

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Some time after this he accepted an invitation from the Empress to pay a visit to Petersburg. He was honourably received, lodged, fed, and flattered. After a time he found the climate disagree with him, and returned to Paris. Some of his malicious friends said, that, in fact, the Empress, having a mind to change her favourite, did not like to exhibit her inconstancy to Diderot; and when he came to wait upon her one day, suddenly affected great anxiety for the state of his chest, and affectionately urged him to set off immediately on his return. However this may be, it is affirmed that his constitution received a shock from which it never recovered. Diderot returned weakened in health, yet still able to pursue his avocation, and to carry on a fierce war against the antiquated errors of piety and purity. *La Réligieuse* was the production of this period.

In 1784, he was seized with an attack on the lungs, which was followed by paralysis and dropsy. During his illness, he was attended by his daughter, with an assiduity not to be surpassed. One of his last enjoyments was in long conversations with this daughter, who

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has since written his life, and published his correspondence. The curé of St. Sulpice waited upon him, and was favourably received; but when he suggested that a recantation of former opinions might have a great effect, Diderot answered, — "I can believe it, Sir; but you must allow that I should tell a most impudent lie." The cause of religion is little advanced by these attempts, even when most successful. It is commendable to use every means of persuasion to induce a man sincerely to repent the wrong he has done, but it is surely of little profit to extort a nominal recantation of opinions. Is it to the advancement of piety, that infidelity should have to boast of the mature intellect, the vigorous pen, the active exertion; and that religion should have for her share the doting mind, the shattered nerves, and the failing strength? How many of these dying recantations are extorted from a morbid weakness, a tenderness to relations or friends who are left behind, and an anxiety rather for a peaceful departure from this world, than the hope of a joyful reward in the next!

Diderot affords at once an example of a chief and a pupil of the French school of phi-

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losophers. His disposition was naturally kind and disinterested; the proof of which is to be found not only in various anecdotes which are related of him, but in the undoubted record of the strong attachment of his wife and daughter, and the sincere affection borne him by his friends. But having imbibed a notion that the passions ought to be indulged, and that man's only duty was to make himself happy, he failed in every relation of life: — As a son, he was disobedient to a kind parent; as a husband, having had the good fortune to meet with a woman ardently devoted to him, he abandoned her for a faithless mistress and a philosophical prostitute. This conduct rendered bitter the life of her, to whose character her daughter bears the following touching testimony: — "She never ceased to fulfil the duties of a mother and a wife, with a courage and a constancy of which few women would have been capable. If the tender love she bore my father could have slackened, she would have been happier, but nothing could drive her away from it for a moment; and, since he is no more, she regrets the pain he caused her, as another would regret happiness."

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With regard to his general character as a writer, we may borrow the words of one of his greatest friends and admirers, to show that here likewise the system he professed was injurious to his excellence, and to his true fame. "When I bring before my mind," says the Baron de Grimm, "the recollection of Diderot, the immense variety of his ideas, the astonishing multiplicity of his knowledge, the flow, the warmth, the impetuous tumult of his thoughts, all the charm and disorder of his imagination, I venture to compare his soul to nature, such as he saw her, rich, fertile, and abundant in every kind of seed; soft and wild, simple and majestic, good and sublime, but without any governing principle, without a master, and without a God. I am not disposed to lament the incredulity of the age; superstition has done so much harm to mankind, that we must thank reason for having at last broken the yoke; but willingly as I excuse to all men their unbelief, I think it would have been greatly to be desired, for the reputation of M. Diderot, perhaps for the honour of his age, that he had not been an atheist. The pertinacious war which he thought himself

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obliged to wage against God made him lose the most precious moments of his life, often turned him away from the cultivation of letters and arts, above all, made him neglect the talent which appeared likely to assure him the greatest fame. He made himself a philosopher; nature had destined him for an orator or a poet." * This unsuspected opinion is doubtless the true one. With less variety and less disorder,—with a character more disciplined, and a mind more regulated,—Diderot, instead of wandering through a wilderness, might have found a region of literature which he could have cultivated and adorned. As it is, the volume and talent of his works form a singular contrast with his fame and his influence. In metaphysics, he wrote the "Letters on the Blind," the "Interpretation of Nature," and some other works. In geometry he distinguished himself by several short essays: he was the author of a new style of dramatic literature; a critic of the fine arts, especially of painting; and above all, the chief writer in the Encyclopædia; in some of the

* Corr. de Grimm, Nov. 1786.

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articles of which, he describes the mechanical arts with a clearness and precision of language which had never been employed upon such objects before. With all this, his works are scarcely ever read, and among the great classics of France the name of Diderot is not to be found.

In religion and metaphysics his opinions were those of a decided atheist. He believed that man is bound by an unconquerable necessity; that his actions are governed by motives as surely as a balance is moved by a weight; that in consequence no man is to be blamed for doing wrong, and the murderer is no more culpable than the whirlwind. Yet he held that malefactors ought to be put to death, in order to furnish motives against doing wrong. He taught that the only duty of man is to provide for his own happiness, which, indeed, is only to be attained by a virtuous life. Yet he always spoke of the passions as the natural, and therefore inevitable impulses of man: he considered humility impossible, and the appearance of it hypocrisy: he discouraged all restraint upon our inclina-

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tions, and proscribed modesty, as the invention of superstition.

The views of Diderot on the question of morals, however, will be most fairly explained by quoting his own words in a catechism which he wrote, expressly to vindicate his school from misrepresentation.

THE SAGE. — What are in your opinion the duties of man?

THE PROSELYTE. — To seek his own happiness. From thence is derived the necessity of contributing to the happiness of others; in other words, of being virtuous.

THE SAGE. — What do you think of just and unjust?

THE PROSELYTE. — Justice consists in fidelity in observing engagements. Justice cannot consist in such and such positive actions, because the actions to which one gives the name of just vary according to the countries, and that which is just in one is unjust in another. Justice, therefore, can be nothing else than the observance of the laws.

THE SAGE. — Do you renounce the meanness of humility and the forgiveness of injuries?

THE PROSELYTE. — Humility is a falsehood: where is the man who despises himself? And if this man exists, so much the worse for him! To be estimable, a man must esteem himself. As for the forgiveness of injuries, it is a sign of a great mind, and was a moral virtue before it was a Christian virtue.

THE SAGE. — Do you promise to follow faithfully the voice of nature, and of the passions?

THE PROSELYTE. — What does this voice tell us? To make ourselves happy. Ought one, and can one resist it? No, the most virtuous, and the most corrupt man equally

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obey it. It is true that she speaks a very different language to them; but let all men be enlightened, and she will speak to all the language of virtue. We are wrong to attribute to the passions the crimes of men; it is their false judgment that we ought to accuse. The passions always tell us right, because they always inspire the desire of happiness; it is the head which guides us ill, and makes us take a wrong road to reach it. But I shall be told, Experience is against your opinion, and we see the most enlightened man often the most vicious. I answer, that these persons are very ignorant of their true happiness, and thereupon I appeal to their own hearts: if there is a single man upon the earth who has not had reason to repent of a bad action committed by him, let him contradict me from the bottom of his soul. In fact, what would morality be if it were otherwise? What would virtue be? We should be fools to follow her, if she led us away from the path of happiness, and we ought to stifle in our hearts the love she inspires, as the most fatal passion. No, the road of happiness is the road of virtue. *

The first principle of this system, it is evident, destroys all the moral feelings by which the peace of society is maintained. Let it be established, that our actions are the result of a blind, chance-driven necessity, and the perpetrators of crime instead of being objects of abhorrence will excite only our compassion. The very punishments that we think it necessary to inflict will but increase our pity for the

* Œuvres de Diderot, vol. i. p. 337.

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unfortunate victims of an eternal injustice. Thus the horror of crime, the great barrier between innocence and guilt, is broken down, and a mutual indulgence substituted in its place. Those whose nature it is to be kind and virtuous might be permitted to tread unmolested the path of uprightness; but the vicious, the turbulent, the profligate, will have a like connivance in their pursuits, and the maxim, *de gustibus non disputandum* may be applied to the man who makes a fortune by the forgery of a will, or the assassination of a benefactor.

But it is said, that when men become enlightened they will discover that the true road to happiness is by the way of innocence and virtue. Let us pass by, at present, the grave objection, that every man is to make his own definition of innocence and virtue, and that M. Diderot himself, whose enthusiasm for virtue led him to neglect his wife for a metaphysical mistress, might be surprised to learn that other persons would deem such conduct immoral and disgraceful. But leaving alone this distinction, where, we may ask, is any proof to be obtained, that men will at last

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learn that vice leads to misery, and virtue to happiness? Will the passions be less strong in future times than they have been in past? Will not the vicious man be always able to say, "You tell me I am to seek only my own happiness. I know that what you call vicious indulgences are to me delightful; and that what you call innocent pleasures are to me irksome and disagreeable. I am the best judge of my own happiness, and I choose my own path to seek it."* Would not such a man be countenanced by natural feelings? Is it so true that all men, if enlightened, would live virtuously, in order to live happily? Put aside the moral obligation, the divine command, and how will you persuade a young man of strong passions that it is pleasanter to get up early and read philosophy, than to sit up late at the gaming table?

Connected with this doctrine of Diderot is the theory of Helvetius, whose book, *De l'Esprit*, is indeed, in great part, written by

* One may here call to mind the remark of the lady, who, drinking a glass of iced water said, "How good it is! I wish it were a sin!" The temptation of forbidden fruit to poor human nature is as strong at this hour as it was at the creation.

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Diderot. Helvetius teaches, in a very coarse fashion, the system that all our motives resolve themselves into selfishness; and that the man who rushes into a gulf to save his country is no less selfish than he who lays up hoards of gold that he may look at them every day. Some writers have acutely remarked, that this elaborate system was, after all, a mere play upon words; and that Helvetius called selfish what other men had agreed to call generous and disinterested. Yet there is something more than this in such a theory. Could men generally be brought, which they never will, to think that what appears generous is not really so, and that, after all, selfishness is the universal cause, the sun of human life is at once extinguished. Generosity becomes a word without true meaning, and actions of the most different nature are confounded by one name, and placed in the same class. The tendency of this whole system is to degrade; to bring philosophy from the heavens, not to walk erect upon the earth, but to grovel and to crawl in the cellars and the sinks of our towns.

One consideration, and that the most im-

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portant, yet remains. The system of Diderot and his disciples struck out of the world its Lord and Master: — he "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secret is hid," was blotted from the face of the universe. Every man was left to adapt, as he best might, his conduct through life, to the variable standard of his own notion of good and bad, honest and vicious. The eye of an Omnipotent and Omnipresent Creator, marking wrong with eternal reprobation, and approving of right by a fixed invariable law, was to him for ever obscured. The supreme, unerring Judge was obliterated, and in his place a mixture of spurious philosophy, deified passions, and worldly reputation was set up as the arbiter and guide of human conduct. Need any words be employed to show, that men thus set loose from their former teachers, and abandoned to the wild caprices of uncertain guides, were likely to lose the path of honesty, and to wander through every vice, misled by every error?

One other doctrine of the school of Diderot, which they practised as well as taught, remains to be noticed. The qualities called modesty,

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decency, decorum, and delicacy, were entirely banished from their list of virtues. They held, that there could be no shame in avowing what nature prompted us in doing, and that when society had become sufficiently enlightened, all the restraints by which certain subjects are withdrawn from public notice would be abolished by common consent. It is surely not necessary to refute such a doctrine. It has been poetically, yet truly, said of the graces, —

> From them flow all the decencies of life;
> Without them nothing pleases. Virtue's self
> Admired, not loved. And those on whom they smile,
> Great, though they be, and beautiful, and wise,
> Shine forth with double lustre.

The slightest perusal of the letters and recorded conversations of this philosophical society would soon convince any one that their system was as contrary to taste as to religion and morality. The total want of propriety, the animal grossness of their love, the hollow perfidy of their friendship, their irritability at the slightest obstacle to their own gratifications, made their way of life as abhorrent to the refined sensualist as to the hermit

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or the saint. A biographer of Diderot has remarked of one of his novels, that it is indecent in its plan, and obscene in its details, without possessing any charm even for young men the most greedy of such kind of reading. The remark is a just one, and the defect may be attributed to two things, — the one, that the terms of physical science, introduced to illustrate voluptuous pictures, instead of exciting mirth only produce cold disgust; the other, that the author, instead of exaggerating the pleasures of the senses, by gilding them with imagination, lowers the most rapturous passion to the most degrading appetite.

Thus, the result of this philosophical community, after throwing aside the yoke of religion, and casting off the prejudices of a regulated morality, was to debase the standard of pleasure itself, and by decomposing its elements, till the refinements of intellect and fancy had been sublimed away, to leave nothing but the dross of the lowest vicious indulgence; — so that the philosophers of Paris of the eighteenth century; the enlightened leaders of an enlightened people; the unrestrained sensualists of a refined age; the despisers of

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all that was established and had been admired; in short, the guides of mankind to happiness and virtue, ended in promoting an abuse of the understanding, a perversion of the passions, the extinction of fancy, and the corruption of manners.

I have thought it necessary to say so much of Diderot, because, though little read at present, he was the head of a school. Indeed his ambition to reach that distinction was perhaps the cause of his atheism. Voltaire had used all the weapons of deism against Christianity, with a skill which neither Diderot nor any one else could hope to imitate: he was revered, under the title of the Patriarch, by the whole philosophical tribe. Nothing remained for a restless, disordered, fiery ambition, but to plant a new colony still further from the ancient settlement, — to scoff at the temerity and superstition of the school of deism, to hold all belief whatever in contempt, and to astonish by the prospect of a destruction more complete than the boldest unbelievers had yet imagined, even within the secret councils of their leaders. If such were not, as is probable, one of the motives of Diderot, there can be

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little doubt that it influenced many of his disciples. There is something so dreary to the heart, and so appalling to the imagination, in the annihilation of spiritual existence, and the despair of a future life, that if France had been found in that state, all her philosophers, her poets, and her historians would probably have united in preaching the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. But it was a triumph of vanity to proclaim defiance to the faith of centuries, and the more implanted the belief, the greater the distinction of disturbing and overcoming it. It has been well said by the judicious author of the "Essay on the Literature of the 18th Century," that a person who would write the history of vanity in France would describe the causes of many of her revolutions. In that which took place at the close of the eighteenth century vanity inspired her authors, directed her orators, and had no little share even in her executions.

Two of the chief disciples of Diderot afford apt illustrations of this commencement of the revolution. Helvetius, the professed author of the book *De l'Esprit*, which in its time made a great ferment, was the son of a phy-

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sician to the queen, who placed him in the lucrative situation of a farmer-general. Not contented with money, however, he burnt for distinction. As a beginning, he made himself so good a dancer, that, it is said, he sometimes in a mask filled the place of the best dancer of the day upon the theatre. The discoveries of Newton having given a spur to physical science, he attempted mathematics, but in these positive sciences there is no illusion, and he failed. When Voltaire wrote the Henriade, he tried poetry, and composed a long poem; but the world is seldom cheated into an admiration of bad poetry, and it never saw the light. It is otherwise with philosophy: when, therefore, metaphysics came into fashion, Helvetius made the discovery that selfishness is the true principle of morals; and having got large assistance from Diderot, he attained the honours of notoriety and persecution. Yet Helvetius, after all, far from being a philosopher, was a mere sensualist. In his youth he was famed for his prodigality and his seraglio; in mature years he retired to the country, and was accounted the most severe preserver of game in the province where he

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resided. His friends liked him for his good humour and kindness; but even his kindness had much of vanity in it.

The Abbé Raynal was a gentleman who, when invited to dinner, used to make notes of the subjects upon which he hoped to shine in conversation. Diderot employed two years in writing long dissertations for his "Philosophical History of the Indies." When he had written any thing more than usually audacious, he used to say, "But who will dare to put his name to this?"—"I," said the Abbé: "go on; I will avow it all." When in society he was continually enquiring and questioning, and taking notes for his book. The work thus composed, partly of his own researches, partly of loose conversation, and partly of the rhapsodies of Diderot, merits the character given of it by Turgot, in a letter to the Abbé Morellet, who was at that time travelling in England: — "I am curious to know what the English think of the *Histoire des deux Indes*. I confess that, admiring the talent of the author and his work, I have been a little shocked with the incoherence of his ideas, and at seeing the most opposite paradoxes put

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forth, and defended with the same warmth, the same eloquence, the same fanaticism. He is sometimes as rigorous as Richardson, sometimes immoral like Helvetius; an enthusiast, at one time, of the soft and tender virtues, at another of debauchery, at another of brute courage; treating slavery as abominable, and wishing to maintain men as slaves; reasoning absurdly in physics, in metaphysics, and often in politics. In short, there is no conclusion to be drawn from his book, except that the author is a man of great talent, well informed, but who has no fixed notion, and is carried away by his enthusiasm like a young rhetorician. He seems to have tried to maintain successively all the paradoxes which came into his mind during his studies and his dreams. He is more learned, more feeling, and has a more natural eloquence than Helvetius; but he is, in truth, as incoherent in his ideas, and as great a stranger to the true philosophy of man." Yet these were the books by which opinion was to be guided in the new era. No wonder, surely, that, in unsettling the old fabric, philosophy built up nothing solid in its place.

Such was the school of Diderot. We have

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now to speak of a colleague, and fellow-labourer, indeed, but a greater man, and of less questionable fame.

The celebrated D'Alembert, one of the principal chiefs of the philosophers of France, was the natural son of Destouches, the comic writer, and of Madame de Tencin, the notorious chanoinesse of the regency. The child was left exposed on the steps of the church of St. Jean-le-Rond, and carried from thence to the Foundling Hospital, where he was named Jean Le Rond. His father took him from the hospital, and put him to nurse with the wife of a glazier of the name of Rousseau. The attachment of D'Alembert to this good woman is one of the most honourable traits of his character. When, attracted by his fame, Madame de Tencin wished to see him, he would not go without *la femme* Rousseau; and his manner was so cold to his reputed mother, that, piqued and mortified, she said to him, "But I am your mother."— "You my mother! no, here is my mother: I know no other;" and he threw himself into the arms of Madame Rousseau, shedding tears of emotion. When, later in life, his physician wished him to lodge in a

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healthier part of the town, it was with the greatest difficulty that he was brought to leave the roof of his nurse; and when, still later, her husband died, and his heirs were disposed to treat her harshly, he flew to her house and exclaimed, — "Let these wretches take it all; I will not abandon you." He kept his word most faithfully to the last moment of her life.

The reputation of D'Alembert as a mathematician is too well known to require any observation here. Nor is it the purpose of this review to discuss the merit of works which belong to the general history of science or literature; it would indeed be leaving our direct path to dilate upon them.

The Preliminary Discourse of the Encyclopédie is more akin to our subject. In this short treatise D'Alembert has analysed with wonderful acuteness the sources and springs of our scientific knowledge. It must be confessed, indeed, that the part which relates to moral science is far inferior to that which treats of physical and mathematical; yet, upon the whole, there existed but one man in the past age who could execute such a book, and probably there exists but one in the present,

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who, were his whole mind to be given to the task, could do equal justice to the actual state of our knowledge.

D'Alembert found his greatest solace in the cultivation of mathematics. When least at ease, he would go, as he said, "*se claquemurer dans la géometrie,*" and would then wish for no other company. He told a lady, that he wished for her own happiness she knew mathematics, so peaceable and certain were the pleasures that this study gave him.

D'Alembert was of a temper which stood in need of some absorbing and passionless occupation; he was exceedingly sensitive upon any cause of disquiet. When his articles in the Encyclopédie brought on violent accusations of irreligion, he so far lost his equanimity, that he entreated M. de Malesherbes to suppress the writings of his adversaries. The reply of Malesherbes is worth recording. Lamenting to a common friend that the office of Inspector of Books, which he had undertaken with a view to be of service to literary men, with whom he had passed his life, had, on the contrary, been a source of jealousy and dispute between them and him, he thus explains his

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principles on this subject to D'Alembert himself: — "I am truly sorry for the pain which the criticisms of Fréron and others give you. I should wish that nothing should disturb the satisfaction which your success must give you, and that you might enjoy in peace your fame, the only reward worthy of your talents. I see, with still more regret, that passages imprudently scattered in the work, of which you are one of the editors, give rise to charges, of which the consequences are always disagreeable. But I make a great difference between what displeases me, or even what I disapprove as an individual, and what I ought to prevent as a public man.

"My principles are in general that literary criticism is permitted, and that every criticism which has for its sole object the work criticised, and in which the author is only judged according to his works, is literary criticism. I do not mean that if an author abused this permission on a grave subject, those who thought themselves injured should be denied the right of appealing to the regular tribunals, as has happened several times; but the functions of administrator of the book department, and

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that of censor, do not consist in preventing such abuses: if they did, it might be apprehended that, under pretence of hindering personal defamation, we might suppress any criticism which might be thought too severe, and we might come by degrees to prevent any kind of criticism, or at least put such restrictions on it as to reduce it to nothing.

"The charge of irreligion, you will tell me, exceeds the limits of literary criticism; but you will be answered, that it is impossible to defend the cause of religion without unmasking those who attack it; that this accusation can never be reckoned personal, when it is not on the conversation, nor on the actions of the author that the charge is founded, but only on the works which he has spontaneously given to the public; and it is, above all, on this question that it might be feared that the tenderness which the censor might entertain for the author might hinder truth from coming to light.

"These principles will appear to you very harsh, and I know too well the sensitiveness of authors on what interests their self-love to flatter myself that you or any other author

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attacked in the pamphlets will adopt them; but after having a long time reflected upon them, I find that they are the only ones that I can follow with justice, and without exposing myself to act with partiality."

To reasons like these the philosopher could oppose no solid answer: he only, as his friend the Abbé Morellet tells us, "cursed and swore according to his bad habit." It is curious enough to find a chief of the philosophical sect thus early attempting persecution, and using the first apparent opportunity of power to violate those principles of liberty which his party had so often invoked. Nor is it less instructive to see a minister of the Bourbons laying down those principles of impartial justice and freedom, which no class of Frenchmen could yet comprehend or relish.

Other weaknesses D'Alembert shared in common with less distinguished mortals. A prey to a hopeless passion, he was for a long time the toy of a frivolous coquette; and when he was falling into another similar misery, he was only released from his thraldom by the honest friendship of Madame Geoffrin, who, went to visit the lady, and, by her firm remonstrance, induced her to give up D'Alembert's letters,

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and to promise never to see him again. He afterwards became still more completely the abject slave of Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, who confided to his care all the arrangements necessary for carrying on an intrigue with M. de Mora, a young Spaniard, with whom she was madly in love. When M. de Mora was in Spain, she had such influence over the great philosopher and profound mathematician, the leader of the Academy, and the successor of Newton, that he walked regularly to the general post-office, that she might receive the letters of her lover an hour or two sooner than she would otherwise have done.

D'Alembert was popular in society from his talent of narrating, his inexhaustible store of anecdote, the quickness of his replies, and the humour with which he enlivened every subject on which he touched. With his intimate friends, he was known likewise as an excellent mimic; and his imitation of a country lecture raised shouts of laughter. A few of his replies or repartees are preserved, and are worthy of his reputation. Some one said to him, in a melancholy tone, "*Qui est-ce qui est heureux?*" —"*Quelque misérable,*" answered D'Alem-

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bert. Another person complained, that many foolish things he had never said were circulated in his name. "*Tant pis pour vous, Monsieur, on ne prête qu'aux riches.*" Fontenelle, somewhat jealous of his youthful reputation, told him, that the candidates for the academy were estimated on a ratio compounded of age and merit. "Quite just, provided the ratio is compounded directly as the merit, and inversely as the age." With the same tact and happy expression, he said, when Count Lally was beheaded, "Every one had a right to put Lally to death, except the executioner."

D'Alembert suffered dreadfully from the stone: many of his friends wished him to undergo an operation, but he as constantly refused. "Those are fortunate who have courage,—for myself I have none." He never allowed a surgeon to approach him; a conduct which made some reflect on his want of fortitude, at a time when an archbishop of Paris, more than eighty years of age, had successfully endured the operation to which he refused to submit. D'Alembert died in consequence, on the 29th of October, 1783, at the age of sixty-six, or nearly so.

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Persons who lived intimately with D'Alembert remarked of him, that he was good without goodness, feeling without sensibility, vain without pride, and melancholy without sorrow. But this is too harsh a judgment. He seems, indeed, to have had no great strength or magnanimity of character; and while free from any great vices, his mind was not lofty enough to preserve him from little jealousies, unworthy of his understanding and his fame. In this respect he was not unlike Addison. But it was fortunate both for his peace and his reputation that he did not covet great riches or high rank: he was content with the modest salary of philosophy, with the addition of quiet society, and universal fame. Thus when Frederic of Prussia proposed to make him the chief of his academy, he declined the honour, in a letter which breathes the very spirit of a philosophical love of retirement. He likewise declined a magnificent offer of the Empress of Russia, who wished to place her eldest son under his care. It should not be omitted, that although he was content to live at Paris in a small lodging, yet, when engaged on the Encyclopédie, he three times raised his

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price on the booksellers, and at length broke his partnership with Diderot, because he could not get what he wanted. This trait is, however, to his honour: his labours were fairly entitled to reward; and he who refused the gifts of princes, might honestly claim the wages of science.

Without dwelling on the character of individual writers, I will conclude this subject with some account of the state of society in which literary men of the eighteenth century lived, and moved, and had their being.

The house where the men of letters seem first to have assembled as a class, was that of Madame Geoffrin. This lady used to give two dinners every week,—one to the authors and men of letters, the other to the artists. She likewise received the most distinguished men of the state and of the court; but if her protestations to the literary part of her society are to be believed, it was solely on their account that she tried to conciliate men in power. Her character, however, naturally led to this compromise. She was very intelligent, very fond of good conversation, very benevolent, and extremely timid. She loved

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the philosophers; but could not bear to hear them talk against the prevailing maxims of the state. For this purpose, therefore, after dining with her, D'Alembert, Marmontel, Morellet, and others, used to adjourn to the Garden of the Tuileries, where they held forth at their ease against despotism, the government, the clergy, and in the seven years' war were hearty admirers of the King of Prussia. Madame Geoffrin would sometimes keep one of them with her; and then recollecting herself, cry, "Pooh! fool that I am! as if they were not waiting for you at the bottom of the stairs." Her kindness to men of letters was not confined to hospitality: she gave to D'Alembert, Thomas, and Morellet each a life-annuity of 1200 livres. Morellet had written a pamphlet in favour of a free trade with India, which ill accorded with her notions, and she did not conceal her dissent; but finding that he had not obtained the reward he expected from a minister, she went to him, and after roundly rating him for his work, she added, "You see they have not rewarded you: your fortune is not at all advanced. Come, give me your name, and your certificate of baptism: go to-

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morrow to my notary: I have settled 15,000 livres upon you: don't tell any one, and don't thank me." Her manner on one of these occasions was in itself an epigram. She offered M. de Rhulhière a considerable sum to engage him to throw into the fire his manuscript work on the court of Russia. He answered by a great display of honour, virtue, and courage, and declared vehemently that such an action would be the basest and vilest in the world. After hearing him with calmness, Madame Geoffrin asked, "Do you want more?" Rhulhière told this story himself to the Count de Schomberg, who exclaimed involuntarily, "Oh! how sublime!" Another saying of hers was often repeated. The Comte de Coigny, one day at dinner, was pursuing the cold scent of a long story, when, upon somebody asking him to carve the dish before him, he took a little knife out of his pocket, continuing his story as before. Madame Geoffrin, at length losing all patience, called out, "M. le Comte, at dinner there should be only long knives, and short stories."

It was her nature to abound in kindness.

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When a child, if she saw a beggar from the window she threw him victuals, clothes, and any thing she could lay her hand upon. Of her goodness in later life many anecdotes are told, of which one may suffice. She had ordered two marble vases from Bouchardon. When they came home, she perceived that the cover of one of them was broken. The two workmen who had brought the vases said, that it had been broken by one of their comrades, who was so unhappy that he had not ventured to come with them, and that he was much to be pitied; for if their master found it out, he would dismiss him, and that he had a wife and four children. Madame Geoffrin promised not to mention it. When the workmen were gone, she reflected on the story; and calling one of her servants, said, "Go to M. Bouchardon's; ask for a certain workman; give him twelve livres, and three livres to his companions who spoke so well in his favour." She was not only benevolent herself, but undertook the irksome task of inducing her friends to be so. "When," said she, "I relate the situation of some unfortunate person for whom I wish to get assistance,

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I do not break open the door, I only place myself close to it, and wait till it is opened." The only exception she made to this rule was Fontenelle. When she went to him, and stated a case of distress, the veteran said, "They are much to be pitied:" added a few words on the misery of human life, and then spoke of something else. Madame Geoffrin allowed him to take his own course; and when she was going away said, "Give me fifty louis for these poor people."— "Right," said Fontenelle, and gave without hesitation; thus showing that, although he required the spur, he did not want for liberality.

In her old age Madame Geoffrin said of herself, "I perceive with pleasure that in growing old, I become *more good;* I do not dare to say better; for my goodness, like some other people's wickedness, comes, perhaps, from weakness as much as any thing else. I have profited by what the good Abbé of Saint Pierre often told me, that the charity of a good man ought not to be limited to the relief of those who suffer, that it ought to extend also to the indulgence of which their

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faults so often stand in need; and, like him, I have taken for my motto, GIVE AND FORGIVE."

The husband of Madame Geoffrin was as much noted for his stupidity as she was for her understanding. He read over and over again, without perceiving it, the first volume of the Travels of the Père Labbat. Some one asked him what he thought of the book. "Very interesting; but it seems to me that the author now and then repeats what he has said before." He went through the notes of Bayle's dictionary, reading the two columns as if they were one; only sometimes remarking, "What an excellent work, if it were a little less abstruse!" He always dined at his own table, but was desired not to speak. A foreigner returning to Paris, said to Madame Geoffrin, "And what have you done, madam, with the poor man whom I always saw here, and who never said a word?" — "It was my husband: he is dead."

Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse is represented by those who frequented her house to have been the most perfect mistress of the art of conversation in the society where that art

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flourished to so great a degree. It is said that she would give every one his proper weight, and so vary the subjects of discourse as to make every one satisfied with himself, and with all the rest. She would lead when it was required of her to lead, and be silent when her speaking would be an interruption. In fine, she had the most perfect tact for all that was agreeable in the intercourse of a refined community. Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse had been originally a companion to Madame du Deffand, with whom she had quarrelled. D'Alembert on this occasion became her champion; and we have seen with what fidelity he followed her banner. She was a woman of violent passions; and her letters breathe an ardour of love little known in the Parisian climate. Guibert, and Mora the Spaniard, were alternately, and together, the heroes of this romance.

Madame du Deffand, although a professed hater of the philosophers, was too much connected with them not to deserve some mention here. She professed the philosophical creed of Voltaire; and was a correspondent of his during the latter period of his life.

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She was a woman of superior discernment, and very pure wit; free from affectation, and above disguising the heartlessness of her nature. It was she who said, on being asked whether she could believe that St. Denys had walked a whole league with his head under his arm, "*Et cependant, ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute.*"

Of two of her lovers, the President Hénault and M. Pont de Vesle, some characteristic anecdotes are related. The President and his mistress were both complaining, one day, of the continual interruptions which they met with from the society in which they lived. "How happy would one be," said the lady, "to have a whole day to ourselves!" They agreed to try whether this was not possible; and at last found a small apartment in the Tuileries belonging to a friend, which was unoccupied, and where they proposed to meet. They arrived, accordingly, from their separate quarters, about eleven in the forenoon; appointed their carriages to return at twelve at night, and ordered dinner from a *traiteur*. The morning was passed entirely to the satisfaction of both, in the effusions of love and

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friendship. "If every day," said the one to the other, "were to be like this, life would be too short." Dinner came; and before four o'clock sentiment had given place to gaiety and wit. About six the Marquise looked at the clock. "They play Athalie to-night," said she, "and the new actress is to make her appearance." — "I confess," said the President, "that, if I were not here, I should regret not seeing her." — "Take care, President," said the Marquise; "what you say is really an expression of regret: if you had been as happy as you profess to be, you would not have thought of the possibility of being at the representation of Athalie." The President vindicated himself; and ended with saying, "Is it for you to complain, when you was the first to look at the clock, and to remark that Athalie was acted to-night? There is no clock for those who are happy." The dispute grew warm: they became more and more out of humour with one another; and by seven they wished most earnestly to separate. That was impossible. "Ah!" said the Marquise, "I cannot stay here till twelve o'clock. Five hours longer! what a punishment!" There

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was a skreen in the room; the Marquise seated herself behind it, and left the rest of the room to the President. The President, piqued at this, takes a pen, and writes a note full of reproaches, and throws it over the skreen. The Marquise picks up the note, goes in search of pen, ink, and paper, and writes an answer in the sharpest terms. At last twelve o'clock arrived; and each hurried off separately, fully resolved never to try the same experiment again!

After some years the President and she became totally indifferent to each other; but to the eye of the world an appearance of intimate friendship was kept up. The President was on his death-bed in a sort of childish apathy, when Madame du Deffand roared in his ear, "Did you know Madame de Castelmoron?" — "Yes." — "Which did you like best, her or Madame du Deffand?" — Upon which the President, all unconscious as he was, drew a parallel between the two ladies, much lauding the merits of Madame Castelmoron, and pointing out all the faults of Madame du Deffand. The company were not a

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little surprised at this song of the dying swan. It did not disturb the mind of the lady, however, for she went to sup in a large company; and when asked after the health of the President, calmly replied, "Alas! he died at six o'clock this evening, otherwise you would not see me here." And she supped with her accustomed good appetite.

Another story, of which the hero is Pont de Vesle, well illustrates the romantic passions of a great capital. They were sitting together one evening in Madame du Deffand's room, when the following dialogue passed between them: —

"Pont de Vesle?" — "Madame?" — "Où êtes-vous?" — "Au coin de votre cheminée." — "Couché les pieds sur les chenets, comme on est chez ses amis?" — "Oui, madame." — "Il faut convenir qu'il est peu de liaisons aussi anciennes que la nôtre." — "Cela est vrai." — "Il y a cinquante ans." — "Oui, cinquante ans passés." — "Et dans ce long intervalle aucun nuage, pas même l'apparence d'une brouillerie." — "C'est ce que j'ai toujours admiré." — "Mais, Pont de Vesle, cela ne viendrait-il point de ce qu'au fond nous avons tou-

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jours été fort indifférens l'un à l'autre?" — "Cela se pourrait bien, madame."

The letters of Madame du Deffand to Mr. Walpole, which were published some years ago in England, and which well deserved the care bestowed upon them by their able editor, show a kind of irritable sensitive passion for Mr. Walpole in this same heartless woman. She even, it appears, reproached Madame de Choiseul for her want of warmth, by saying, "You *know* that you love me, but you do not *feel* it."

Having thus mentioned the ladies in whose society many of the first men of letters of the day learned the language of good company, I must not any longer omit to notice the German baron, famed for good cheer, and liberty, or rather license, of speculation, who was called by the Abbé Galiani, on both accounts, *Le Maître d'Hôtel de la Philosophie.*

The Baron d'Holbach bore the title of Baron, as the possessor of a small estate in Westphalia, which gave him an income of about 60,000 francs (2500*l.*) a-year. With this moderate fortune he gave two dinners every week to from ten to twenty men of letters and fo-

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reigners of note. There Diderot, Rousseau, Helvetius, Duclos, Roux, Saurin, Raynal, Marmontel, Suard, La Condamine, and many others, were constantly to be seen. There, likewise, Hume, Wilkes, Sterne, the Abbé Galiani, Beccaria, Caraccioli, Lord Shelburne, Garrick, Franklin, and Priestley, mingled with the philosophers and authors of France. The conversation, which was gay and animated, usually turned upon topics of literature and philosophy. Marmontel would explain and defend his theory on literary taste; Diderot would discuss with the master of the house questions of the fine arts, with eloquence and perspicuity. But especially the awful subjects of the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul,—questions which seem to require a species of religious composure and solemn earnestness for their discussion,—were there made the sport of petulant wit, and flimsy declamation. The prevailing tone was that of atheism; the master of the house was himself the author of the *Systême de la Nature*, a dogmatical theory, which made the universe "the noble work of chance." Deism was the profession of the minority. "We were there

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a good number of theists, and not ashamed," says the Abbé Morellet; "we defended ourselves vigorously, but always with great affection for atheists of such good company."

A scene which passed there one day is characteristic of the society. The Abbé Galiani, when Diderot and Roux had vied with each other in saying the boldest impieties in favour of their own doctrines, at last interrupted them, "Gentlemen, gentlemen philosophers, you go very fast. If I were the Pope I would put you in the Inquisition; if I were king of France, in the Bastile; but as I have the good fortune not to be either, I will return here to dinner next Thursday, and you shall hear me, as I have heard you." Thursday came; the Abbé, after dinner, put himself in an arm-chair, with his legs crossed under him like a tailor, when, taking his wig in one hand, and gesticulating with the other like a true Neapolitan, he began thus:—"Let us suppose, gentlemen, that the one among you who is the most convinced that the world is the work of chance finds himself playing with dice, I won't say in a gambling-house, but in the best house in Paris, and his antagonist throwing once, twice,

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three times, four times, in fine, constantly, sixes. In a very short time my friend Diderot, who would be losing his money, would say, without hesitating a single moment, 'The dice are loaded! I'm among sharpers!' What, philosopher? Because ten or twelve throws of the dice have come out of the dice-box in a way to make you lose six francs, you firmly believe that it is the result of a skilful contrivance, of an artificial combination, of an organised cheat; and seeing in the universe such a prodigious number of combinations, a thousand and a thousand times more difficult, and more complicated, and more uniform, and more useful to their end, you yet do not suspect that the dice of nature are also loaded, and that there is above us a great player, who amuses himself with making game of you!" And so he went on with an infinite variety of illustrations, ridiculing the absurdity of the atheistical school to the diversion of all his hearers.

Although the Baron d'Holbach was thus hospitable, he was by no means generous. Helvetius, who gave largely to many, and furnished to some of his guests, as Marivaux and

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Saurin, their whole means of comfortable subsistence, was complaining one day that he could not keep his old friends. "You must consider," answered the Baron, "that you have laid many of them under obligations: I have never done any thing for any of mine, and I have lived with them without a quarrel for these twenty years."

Another German baron we are bound in gratitude to notice; for men of letters of the present day are as much under obligation to him for his correspondence as those of the eighteenth century were to the Baron d'Holbach for his dinners. M. Grimm was the author of a condemned tragedy, who left Germany to visit Paris. There he fell in love with a Mademoiselle Fel of the opera, and was so affected by her rejection of his suit, that he lay for several days stretched out motionless on his bed. This proof of sensibility softened not, indeed, the heart of Mademoiselle Fel, but of greater ladies: Grimm became a man of gallantry and a philosopher. In the former capacity he was the lover of Madame D'Epinay; in the latter, he wrote a journal of the literature of France for the Empress of Russia,

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and some of the princes of Germany. No one ever exceeded him in this species of composition: the wit, the gaiety, and the petulance of Paris, are admirably conveyed to distant climates in the packets of this lively writer. He was made a baron and an envoy: he continued his correspondence till 1790, and lived into the present century.

It is not necessary to dwell longer among the so-styled philosophers. Lay aside their pretensions, and we shall see them to be merely a club of authors, living in a vicious age, and joining the sins of a corrupt society to the errors, and weaknesses, and vanities of the literary profession. Yet all the time, because they professed deism or atheism, they fancied themselves superior to the just, and the wise, and the good. They were swine running down a precipice, and thought themselves eagles mounting above the clouds.

Much has been said and written of the conspiracy formed by the philosophers to overturn religion and monarchy. If by conspiracy is meant a plan which was to end in action, it is clear, from the private correspondence of the leaders, that no conspiracy of that kind ex-

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isted. But it is equally clear that the design of changing the religious faith of France was digested into a system, and carried on by regular steps. Voltaire considered himself, and was duly acknowledged, as the patriarch of the philosophers; and although his authority was scoffed at by a large number, on account of his superstitious belief in the existence of a God, the two parties combined joined their forces against the national religion; and whatever their form of doubt might be, all agreed in rejecting Christianity. Voltaire was earnest in promoting the union. "Let us march under the same standard," he wrote to the Abbé Morellet, "without drum or trumpet: encourage your allies, and let our treaties be secret." Writing to D'Alembert concerning his *Examen de Lord Bolingbroke*, he says, "Women and children will read this work, which is sold cheap. There are now more than thirty tracts which have been circulated in Europe during the two last years: it is impossible that in the end this should not produce some change in the administration of public affairs."

It appears that these tracts were printed at

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the expense of a club or committee in Paris; that they were furnished at a low price, or gratis, to the hawkers, who sold them in the country for ten sous a volume. The secretary of the club Le Roi declared, in 1789, that these works were all composed either by members or under the orders of the society; that when brought to the committee they were abridged, enlarged, made more discreet or more bold as they thought fit. The work then appeared under a title chosen by the society, and was often attributed to an author lately dead. "When we had approved of these books," continues the secretary, "we printed on fine or ordinary paper a sufficient number to pay the expense of printing, and afterwards an immense number of copies on the cheapest paper: we sent these last to booksellers or hawkers, who had them for nothing or almost nothing; but they were enjoined to sell them to the people at the lowest price." *

It was impossible, as Voltaire said, that this practice should not in the end produce some change in the administration of public affairs;

* Lepan, Vie de Voltaire.

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but what that change was to be he seems to have been utterly unable to foresee. For while he looked only to the downfall of Christianity, Rousseau on his side predicted the speedy destruction of monarchy: the nation took their lessons from both, and overthrew monarchy as well as religion.

The doctrines of Diderot and Holbach, although they were never adopted either by the nation or by any governing party, even in the maddest moments of the mad Revolution, contributed to shake the ancient fabric, increasing the tumult, distracting the attention, and promoting the general confusion.

Such were the court, the government, the public opinion of France. From the expiration of the regency half a century had elapsed, and every day of that period beheld the gradual sap of the monarchy carried on by its enemies: its defenders allowed, or indeed rather favoured, their approaches. A king who had no respect for himself, and a clergy who had no fear of God, gave strength to the besiegers, and made successful resistance hopeless.

Madame du Barri reigned at Versailles. An

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obsequious prince put her slippers on her feet as she rose from bed *; a crowd of courtiers flocked to her apartments as soon as she admitted them, to receive, from her lavish hands, the revenues of the state. "Her handkerchief could not fall in the gallery of Versailles without a number of blue ribands disputing for the honour of picking it up."† The nobles emulated the conduct of their sovereign: their seraglios and their homes were equally the dwellings of shameless vice. Within the circle of the court all was license and adulation; without, were discontent, sarcasm, and derision. The children of the aristocracy, bred up without respect for their parents, inherited a broken fortune, and a bad example. The road to power lay through intrigue and protection; and a statesman obtained power only by means which showed him undeserving of it.

Far from the court, separated by feeling, by interest, by habit, lay the preponderance of property and of numbers. A gentry, more noble than the peers of Versailles, attached to the monarchy, but alienated from the court,

* The Prince of Condé. † Saying of M. Marigny.

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saw with indignation the preference given to a few fawning families, decorated with titles, and loaded with favours. The merchants and tradesmen, who, under the shade of internal peace, and with the progress of commerce, had risen to wealth and independence, despised a feeble government, which they considered destitute alike of virtue and intelligence. They waited but a signal to break down the barriers which pride had raised between them and the favoured caste. The people, in general, felt neither affection nor respect for their rulers: they were ready for the impulse of a master hand.

To correct all these evils arose a race of writers who tore up the tares and the wheat together; who made purity of manners as ridiculous as prejudice, and principle no less despised than superstition. All opinions, all faith, all religion, and all morality, were tossed into one cauldron, from which was to be extracted the youth of France. The reins, dropping from the hands of indolence, were seized by the grasp of arrogance. The extravagance of pomp was to be clipped by the scissors of envy; and the supine selfishness

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of pride was rebuked by the restless movements of vanity. The blindness of the one party refused the amendment of abuse; the rashness of the other was not to be satisfied by temperate improvement. The flippancy of superficial learning encountered the ignorance of ancient prejudice: presumption entered the field against bigotry; and the vices of a corrupt capital set themselves in judgment upon the profligacy of a cankered court. As the contending winds rushed together, the small voice of reason was not to be heard; and nothing but the wreck of the tempest could persuade men of the danger of the voyage. One event alone was anxiously expected, as a signal for departure to the bark of the state upon this perilous enterprise.

Lewis the Fifteenth was seized in the month of May, 1774, with the symptoms of the small-pox, caught, as some say, from a young girl. In a few days the disease proved fatal. A party of the philosophers went to Sèvres to get the earliest intelligence. A colleague and friend (the Abbé Morellet) met them on their return to Paris, and some of them called out to him from one of the car-

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riages, — "It is all over." To their minds, no doubt, these words implied that a glorious prospect was about to open. They imagined, we may well suppose, that the last obstacle to the triumph of philosophy was removed, and that the reign of happiness and freedom was about to commence: — such is the foresight of the human understanding! Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse alone, from despondency of character, or perhaps from fear of a bigoted successor, presaged that the new reign would be more calamitous than that which had just concluded.

Beauvais, the virtuous bishop of Senez, preached a funeral sermon on the departed king, in which he did not fear to say, "The people, doubtless, have no right to murmur, but doubtless also they have the right to be silent; and the silence of the people is the lesson of kings."

Such were the various feelings excited by the death of Lewis. The courtiers of the late king lamented their loss; those of the new rejoiced at their gain: the philosophers eagerly pressed forward to shake down the tottering fabric of the state; the people, in deep but

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silent emotion, awaited the eventful reign. If France could then have known "the things which belonged unto her peace," how smooth might have been her path, how happy her lot! "But they were hid from her sight."

THE END.

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